

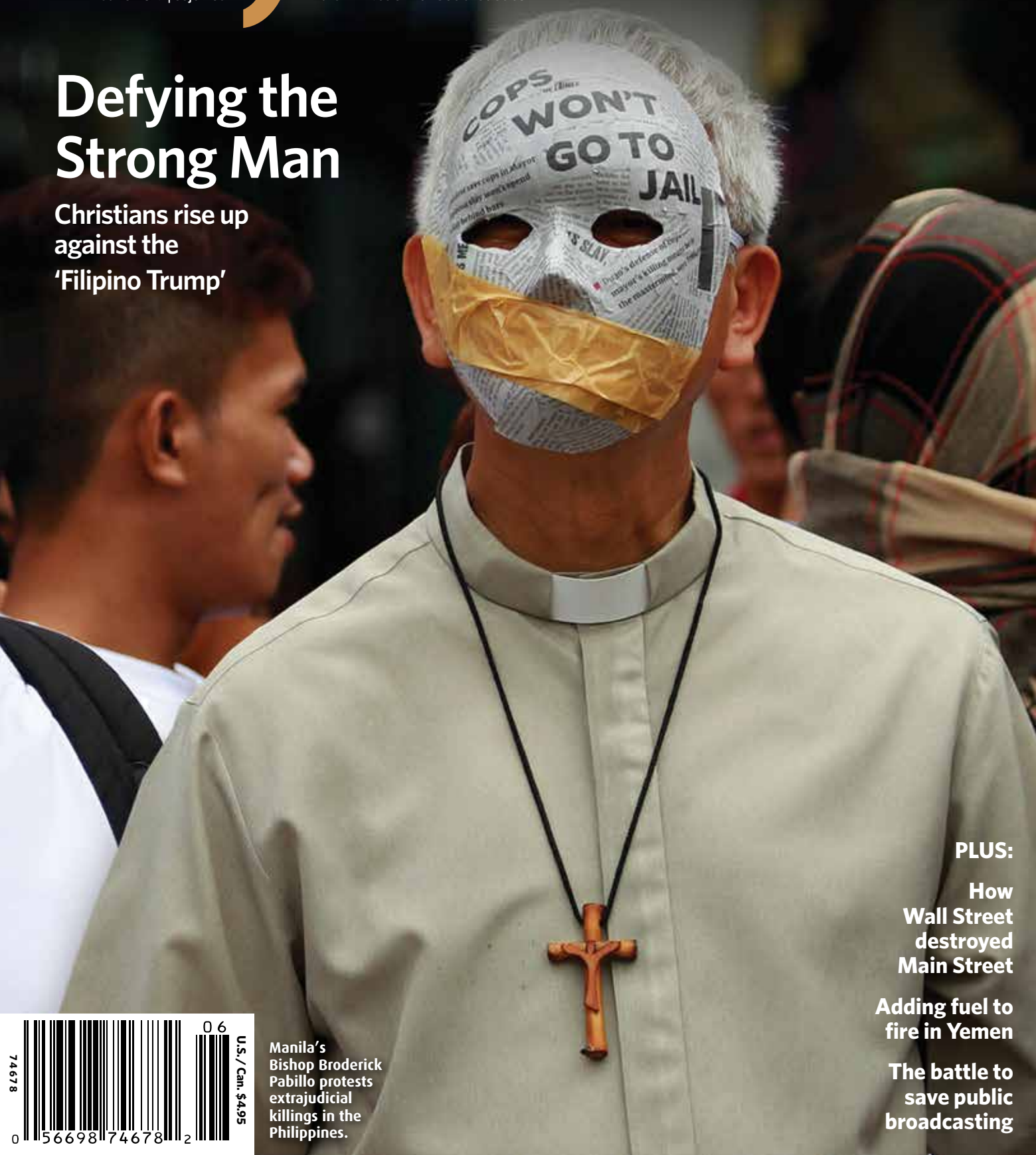
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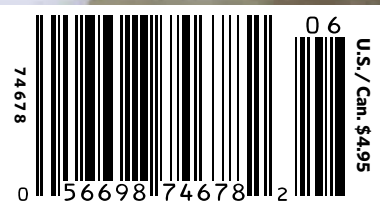
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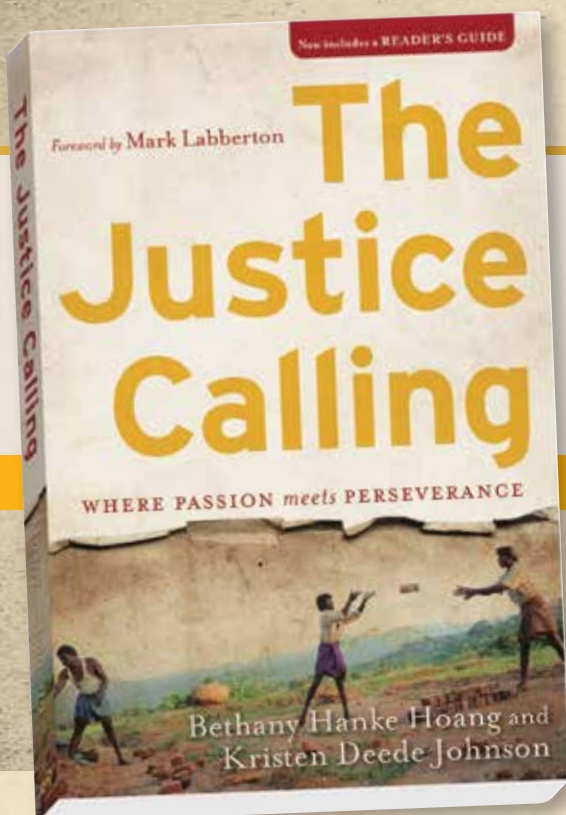
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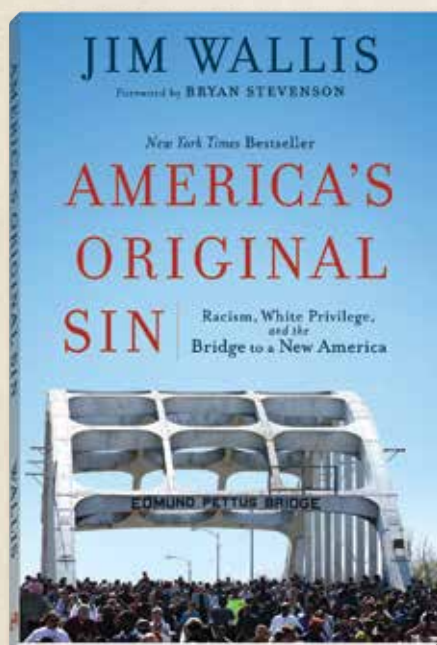
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"MY HOPE FOR the future is that the church will be an authentic witness to the gospel despite the cost," Filipino Bishop Francisco F. Claver, SJ, told *Sojourners* in 1979, "even if it means being crushed." In the decades that followed, *Sojourners* reported the involvement of Filipino Christians in the People Power movements against repressive regimes that were often aligned with U.S. military power. Christians who spoke out were branded as communists. Many were tortured and killed by the military or vigilante groups.

But the Filipino church, though pressed, was never crushed. "I've been very encouraged by what I have seen in our people," Karl Gaspar said in a 1988 issue of *Sojourners*. Gaspar—a Filipino poet, Redemptorist brother, and longtime friend

of *Sojourners*—spent two years in prison in the early '80s under the regime of Ferdinand Marcos. Yet he remained hopeful, "convinced that God is present despite all that which would negate God's presence in this village."

In this issue, Eric Stoner reports on faith-based opposition to Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines' president who positioned himself as a "tough on crime" political outsider and declared himself "happy to slaughter" the nation's 3 million drug users—and seems to be making good on his promise. In response, a network of faith communities is documenting the widespread killings and advocating more humane (and effective) ways of dealing with the country's drug problem. Bishop



Jose Colin Bagaforo warned recently that Duterte "has slowly metamorphosed into a full-time dictator." Stoner traveled to the Philippines in January for interviews with those struggling on the frontlines with the poor and targeted.

Of course, the Philippines isn't the only country grappling with right-wing authoritarian leaders. As Stoner notes, the Filipino model—rooted in decades of organizing and peace education—has much to teach the rest of us about the patient work of resistance.

This month, we also welcome Kathy Khang as our newest columnist. We think you'll enjoy her swift wit, lively faith, and honest wrestling (even if you never get the chance to see her closet full of really excellent T-shirts). ■

Letters

Unfounded Intimations?

Responding to the recent *Sojourners* article by Ryan Rodrick Beiler ("Undeterred by the Facts," February 2017) regarding the arrest and detention of World Vision Gaza Director Mohammed el-Halabi, I would like to clarify the following pertinent issues.

El-Halabi has been indicted on charges of membership in a terror organization, use of material goods for terror, providing intelligence and material aid to the enemy in wartime, and illegal possession of arms and ammunition. If a plea deal will not be agreed between the sides, the Israeli state prosecution will present evidence on all these charges in a manner consistent with due process, fair trial, and maximum possible transparency given security considerations.

Hence, it is hard to understand Rodrick Beiler's conclusion that Israel is "undeterred by the facts." The case will move forward based only on evidentiary fact. Beiler also questions why Israel would level such charges against a Christian aid organization. The only reason is that, unfortunately, due to lack of adequate oversight, the charges appear to be true. This is probably why Western donor countries have suspended aid to World Vision Gaza operations pending trial.

"Whom will you believe?"

We also reject and totally deny the unfounded intimations in Rodrick Beiler's report that el-Halabi has been mistreated in Israeli custody. This is not the case. El-Halabi has also had access at all times to professional medical care and has been visited by his attorneys and family.

Itai Bardov

Embassy of Israel
Washington, D.C.

Ryan Rodrick Beiler Responds:

Itai Bardov writes at length about the fair trial that Mohammed el-Halabi will be granted by the Israeli legal system. He then declares that "the charges appear to be true." This is consistent with the Israeli foreign ministry's campaign, as described in my article, to hype el-Halabi's presumed guilt long before due process has had the chance to take its course.

Recent and extensive documentation by international, Israeli, and Palestinian human rights organizations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, B'Tselem, Al Haq, and others) has indicated routine use of torture and other forms of abuse of Palestinians within the Israeli legal system, adding credibility to el-Halabi's allegations of such treatment.

Regarding el-Halabi's alleged crimes, and the claim that "Western donor countries have suspended aid" to World Vision, I would direct Bardov to the recent investigation conducted by the Australian government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which "uncovered nothing to suggest any diversion of government funds" on the part of el-Halabi.

While it is doubtful that the Israeli legal system will offer el-Halabi a "fair trial and maximum possible transparency," as Bardov claims, it is certain that World Vision, the Australian government, and the international human rights community present a very different narrative from that offered by Netanyahu's right-wing Israeli government. Whom will you believe?

Correction: Our May 2017 issue credited climate change research to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. The surveys were actually a partnership between George Mason University's Center for Climate Change Communication and the Yale program.

Get the last word. Write to letters@sojo.net or *Letters, Sojourners*, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

Lies and Damn Lies



LIVING IN THE United States in the first months of Donald Trump's presidency often feels surreal, disorienting, and overwhelming, including to some people in positions of considerable responsibility and influence.

There are, of course, many reasons for this, and those who regularly read my columns can no doubt list many of the things that most perturb and anger me about this administration. Many of us are focused on our solidarity and support for those who are most vulnerable in the face of the new political realities. We have lifted up the Matthew 25 Pledge movement aimed at protecting undocumented immigrants threatened with deportation, African Americans and other people of color threatened with

illegally wiretapped Trump Tower during the campaign. The president lied, accusing his predecessor of a serious crime with no justification or evidence. Rather than retracting it and apologizing, Trump has tasked his administration and the intelligence community with finding any shred of evidence to retroactively justify his lie.

It is also worth remembering the context in which Trump emerged as a political figure. Though already famous due to his real estate deals and reality TV show, he perversely gained much of his credibility with the GOP primary base by feeding their hatred of the country's first African-American president with racist lies about Obama's birthplace that clearly sought to delegitimize him.

Trump's presidential campaign was also largely built on lies, including the claim that Mexico is going to pay for his "big, beautiful wall." David Leonhardt, in a *New York Times* op-ed, argued that Trump "lies in ways that no American politician ever has before," on subjects including (among many other things) "John F. Kennedy's assassination, Sept. 11, the Iraq War, ISIS, NATO, military veterans, Mexican immigrants, Muslim immigrants, anti-Semitic attacks, the unemployment rate, the murder rate, the Electoral College, voter fraud, and his groping of women."

The volume and brazenness of Trump's lies has metastasized outward from him and infected much of his administration, many of the Republicans in Congress, and a distressing number of white Christians who both voted for and continue to support him. The moral compromises on the part of Christians to justify supporting Trump were already immense before the election, but the unwillingness of so many to stand up for truth now further

corrupts their witness.

Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Throughout the scriptures, there is a clear prohibition on lying and dishonesty. It does not reflect well on loyalty to God to defend a lying earthly ruler instead of defending the truth. And the consequences are hardly abstract.

What will happen to a nation's freedom when its people don't know the truth anymore? What happens when the political leader of the nation lies day after day? Under Trump, has repetitive lying become normalized? What will the effect be on our children when even they can see that the president regularly lies? Will that make it harder for parents to tell them to always tell the truth? How does it affect a nation's credibility when the president's supporters say that nobody should take what he says "literally"? What does it do to the nation's moral fabric when intelligence and justice officers tell us that there is no proof behind the president's numerous claims? And what does it mean when the president refuses to accept any responsibility for his mountain of deceptions?

The perpetual and seemingly pathological lying of the president is now more than a political issue, and certainly more than a partisan one; it is a moral and a religious crisis. And it is time for the faith community to defend the truth. Pastors should preach truth from the pulpit. Teachers and parents should clearly point out when the president is lying, and teach children what the truth is. We can all use social media to confront Trump's lies with facts. The truth will indeed set us free, but the unwillingness of the faith community to speak truth to power could push us toward political bondage. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

The seemingly pathological lying of the president is a moral and a religious crisis.

racialized policing, and Muslims threatened with xenophobic hatred and discrimination.

But a unifying theme of all of Trump's outrages and threats is his brazen assault on the very concept of truth and objective, knowable facts. Amid everything that's going on, consuming and interpreting the news each day is considerably more exhausting than it should be because it has never been more difficult to sort fact from fiction. While this isn't entirely Trump's doing, his almost daily falsehoods have the large platform and weight of the presidency to prop them up and pound the American people with persistent and pervasive lying.

This spring, the news cycle was thrown into turmoil for more than a month by Trump's evidence-free allegations that his predecessor, Barack Obama, had

Children stand in the rubble of houses destroyed during a U.S. raid in the village of al-Ghayil, Yemen, on Jan. 29.



Iona Craig

By Stephen Zunes

Adding Fuel to Fire

U.S. military strikes in Yemen are feeding the rise of al Qaeda.

THE CONTROVERSIAL Jan. 29 attack by U.S. forces on a rural township in Yemen exemplifies the failed U.S. policy in the region.

In the first military raid carried out by the Trump administration, one U.S. soldier and at least 25 civilians were killed in the attack on the village of al-Ghayil in central Yemen, including nine children under the age of 13. Among these was 8-year-old Nawar al-Awlaki, an American citizen, who was shot in her family's house. Other civilians killed included visitors whose family has been active in U.N.-mediated de-escalation committees, working to quell violence in the region.

Some leaders of al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) also lived in al-Ghayil. AQAP has taken advantage of Yemen's multi-sided civil war to find refuge in remote areas. AQAP maintains an uneasy relationship with local tribes, many of whom abhor al Qaeda's violent excesses and reactionary interpretation of Islam but respect AQAP's

ability to fight common enemies.

When Navy SEALs found themselves under fire, they called in airstrikes. The barrage hit houses where families slept, killing people and livestock. Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens was also killed.

President Trump initially blamed his own generals and former President Obama for the botched raid. Then, in his first address to Congress, Trump pivoted, describing it as "a highly successful raid that generated large amounts of vital intelligence." Owen's widow was present; Trump referred to her multiple times in his address. Owen's father refused to meet with the president and asked for an investigation into his son's death.

The Trump administration said that 14 AQAP members were killed, but AQAP leader Qasim al-Rimi, a primary target, was not captured. Additionally, the "vital intelligence" recovered was at least 10 years old and already available on the internet. The raid is widely seen as an example of the new

president's determination to grant the U.S. military more leeway in escalating such operations.

The U.S. military involvement in Yemen began with drone warfare 15 years ago under the Bush administration. It dramatically escalated under Obama. Obama's own first attack—ordered Dec. 17, 2009, nearly a year after his inauguration—also ended in disaster. Fourteen suspected terrorists and 41 Yemeni civilians were killed, including children.

Setting aside the deeply troubling moral and legal issues with U.S. military action in Yemen, these operations have proven counterproductive in diminishing terrorist activity.

For example, a 2012 attack killed a highly respected cleric who was an outspoken opponent of AQAP. He was killed while meeting with AQAP officials to demand they curb their activities in the area. After the U.S. assault, the cleric's tribe joined forces with

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AQAP to fight the U.S.-backed Yemeni government. Additionally, there are instances of Yemeni civilians organizing against al Qaeda through nonviolent resistance. In Ghail Bawazeer and elsewhere, videos have shown hundreds of people marching to al Qaeda headquarters to protest reactionary policies and to force out leaders. But the continued threat of drone strikes keeps many Yemenis more afraid of the United States than of AQAP.

The United States has contributed greatly to the suffering of Yemen through its longstanding support for the autocratic Saleh regime that was eventually ousted in part as a result of a largely nonviolent civil

insurrection in 2011; for Saudi Arabia's plan to turn power over to Saleh's vice president, an army general, instead of the broad coalition of popular organizations that led the pro-democracy uprising; and for the Saudi military campaign against Houthi rebels that has killed thousands of civilians.

In March, the Trump administration launched several rounds of missile strikes in Yemen. These policies feed into the rise of al Qaeda. Further militarization of the conflict does not help. ■

Stephen Zunes is a professor of politics and international studies at the University of San Francisco.

By Leslie Copeland-Tune

A Bad and Unjust Idea

Shifting to block grants could cut huge holes in the social safety net.

IN MARCH, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan shared his excitement about block grants. "We are de-federalizing an entitlement, block granting it back to the states, and capping its growth rate," Ryan said. "That's never been done before!"

Ryan's enthusiasm should be alarming, not exciting, for Christians. The block

and Supplemental Security Income, among other programs. Why? Because doing so cuts gaping holes into the safety net that these programs offer those who are struggling, and because "experimenting" with people when they are sick, poor, disabled, or elderly is abhorrent. Scripture is unequivocal on this: We are to honor our elders and care for the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers—the most vulnerable among us.

In congressional budget debates, entitlement programs are often scrutinized for short-term savings because they are big-ticket items. Currently, entitlement programs are funded through the federal government in such a way that anyone who qualifies for the benefits can receive them. Spending on these programs expands and contracts with the economy—with people's need—rather than the budget cycle.

While proponents argue that block grants provide states with more flexibility to improve services, it's more likely to have the opposite effect: Amid competing state mandates, safety net and entitlement programs may become more vulnerable to cuts, with funding drastically reduced over time. High-risk changes in the funding structure could fundamentally shift how entitlement

"Experimenting" with people when they are sick, poor, disabled, or elderly is abhorrent.

grant model is a dangerously ineffective way to protect people when they are economically vulnerable.

What's a block grant and what's it good for? A block grant is a fixed amount of unrestricted funding made by the federal government to a state. Traditionally, block grants have been used for law enforcement, school systems, and public transportation, allowing states more flexibility in administering programs as well as the ability to experiment.

Generally, block grants have not been used for entitlement programs, which include Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps),

From the Archives

June 1987

That's Contemplation

THE OLDEST

mystics that we have in organized religious expression ... all have similar parabolic insights into contemplation. There is a story about the master saying to the disciples, "Tell me how you know when it is dawn." And one disciple says, "Master, is it when we can tell the fig tree from the lemon tree at 100 paces?" And the master says to the disciple, "No, that is not how you will know it is dawn."

So a second disciple says, "Well then, master, is it when you can tell the sheep from the goats at 50 paces?" And the master says, "No, that is not how we shall know when it is dawn." Then the third disciple says, "Well then, master, how do we know that we have seen the dawn?" And the master says, "We will know that we have seen the dawn when we can see the face of Christ in the face of any brother or sister, no matter how near or how far."

That's contemplation. That's the fruit of the contemplative life.

And unless you're putting on the mind of Christ, I don't know if you'll ever see the face of the Christ in the other, or the face of the cosmic, or the face of the people of God in the other. You may be a highly efficient social worker or a marvelously compassionate do-gooder, but you will not necessarily be a Christian contemplative. ■

Joan Chittister, OSB, was president of the Conference of American Benedictine Priories and a Sojourners contributing editor when this interview appeared.



programs are administered, undermine their effectiveness, and, perhaps most important, leave millions of eligible citizens without their basic needs met.

First, shifting the administration of these programs to states is problematic because states, many of which are facing their own budget deficits, could allocate the federal "safety net" money in whatever way they decide. This leaves the programs susceptible to future cuts and the people who depend on them at greater risk. For example, Aid to Families with Dependent Children was "block granted" in the 1990s and renamed Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. Since then, the program has steadily declined, and about a quarter of families who need assistance receive it.

Additionally, block grants often do not require states to adhere to federal standards. Instead, states can change program eligibility requirements based on their own criteria. When states are not required to provide an effective social safety net, they often don't. This not only endangers families in need but pushes increased costs

down the road onto other tax payers.

Finally, the current formula allows funding adjustments to occur in the case of economic downturns, natural disasters, and unexpected factors that result in higher numbers of people needing temporary assistance. Block grants do not allow states to respond to changes in need when there is a recession or natural disaster. States receive a fixed amount of funding regardless of whether there is a dramatic increase in need. This means that states must figure out how to respond to the unexpected increase in need, which may result in changes to eligibility requirements, cuts in benefits, waiting lists, or needs simply going unmet for the most vulnerable.

For Christians, there is no cause for excitement in Ryan's suggestion of "de-federalizing an entitlement, block granting it back to the states." Not only is it a bad idea, it's an unjust one. ■

Leslie Copeland-Tune is director of the Ecumenical Poverty Initiative in Washington, D.C.

By Nate Bacon

A Summons to Action

Grassroots leaders from around the world gather in California in response to Pope Francis' call.

FOR THE PAST three years, Pope Francis has convened leaders of grassroots movements from around the world to extend the church's solidarity with the poor and vulnerable on three critical themes: land, work, and housing.

This winter, a regional gathering of the World Meeting of Popular Movements met in the United States for the first time. Seven hundred grassroots leaders, accompanied by 25 U.S. Catholic bishops, several international representatives, and a delegation from the Vatican, led by Cardinal Peter Turkson, met in Modesto, Calif., with the cardinal bearing a letter of support, invitation, and challenge from Pope Francis.

To the regular themes, U.S. leaders added racism and migration. Participants addressed the pain of exclusion from the perspective of undocumented domestic workers, residents of Flint whose water was

contaminated, Standing Rock water protectors, and the unhoused, while also raising the hope of united, faith-rooted, nonviolent resistance.

Racial justice, in the U.S. and abroad, was a central theme. "Why is blackness a threat in America?" asked Rev. Traci Blackmon. "And how are we, as people of color, ever to be perceived as unarmed, and therefore non-threatening, if our blackness is the weapon that you fear?" Blackmon said that oppression, dehumanization, and racism are rooted in the original sin of desiring to be God and seeking to create God in our own image. John A. Powell, director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, added, "When you 'other' someone in an extreme way, then you treat them as a non-human."

Against the backdrop of President Trump's executive orders threatening immigrants and refugees, there was vibrant

energy around solidarity with these communities and resistance to the inhumane separation of families. Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego called participants to be disrupters. “We must disrupt those who would seek to send troops into our communities to deport the undocumented, to destroy our families,” McElroy said. “We must disrupt those who portray refugees as enemies. We must disrupt those who train us to see Muslim men and women as a source of threat rather than [as] children of God.”

Meeting organizers—PICO National Network, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development—worked with par-

“We must disrupt those who would send troops into our communities to destroy our families.”

ticipants to develop a summons to action, urging every faith community “to declare themselves a sanctuary for people facing deportation and those being targeted based on religion, race, or political beliefs” and promoting statewide gatherings of grassroots movements based on the WMPM model.

Pope Francis offered a warning to those gathered—and to the rest of us. “The grave danger is to disown our neighbors ... deny their humanity and ... the most important commandments of Jesus,” the pope wrote. “The system’s gangrene cannot be white-washed forever because sooner or later the stench becomes too strong;” it begins “to shift the responsibility for all these ills onto a ‘non-neighbor.’”

But the pope also blessed this unprecedented encounter with his hope “that the light of the love of neighbor may illuminate the Earth with its stunning brightness ... and let true humanity burst through with authentic resistance, resilience, and persistence.” ■

Nate Bacon is a missionary with InnerCHANGE, a Christian order among the poor, in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.



IMMIGRATION



JP Keenan/Sojourners

Prepared to Be Sanctuaries

“Our faith will not let us permit the criminalization and scapegoating of immigrants and people of color.” That was the mantra of leaders from more than 60 congregations from the D.C.-Maryland-Virginia area who declared themselves sanctuary churches earlier this year. Other congregations around the U.S. are following suit, pledging to stand in solidarity with all who may be targeted by the Trump administration’s immigration policies.

For ongoing coverage of the faith-based sanctuary movement, visit sojo.net.

QUOTED

“Every black mother and father has had to be nothing less than a griot to their children—telling the stories of people and their God.”

—Kelly Brown Douglas
on being a black mother raising a son
sojo.net/black-mother

from the editors of sojo.net

SPIRITUALITY



The Community That Enneagrams Together...

Love it or hate it, the Enneagram—a personality-typing tool with roots in fourth-century monastic spirituality—is enjoying a renewed moment in U.S. Christianity. But as Sojourners staffer David Potter recently explained in “What the Enneagram Can Teach Us About Beloved Community,” the nine Enneagram temperaments aren’t just useful for self-reflection—they can also teach us a lot about community life. Here are five highlights:

1 To be reconcilers, we must first be reconciled to ourselves. Social transformation is limited by the extent to which people have themselves been transformed.

2 Real community emerges from real people. Exploring the depths of our own humanity and living from a place of authenticity enables real presence with others.

3 Transformation requires a renegotiation of old narratives. If we are to build beloved community in the U.S., we need to renegotiate our identity—which includes engaging messy truths and moving through them toward a desired future.

4 Social change is dynamic and non-linear. We are complex creatures, and our journey toward wholeness and togetherness is a living process.

5 Beloved community requires courage and accountability. We can close our eyes and pretend circumstances or negative behavior patterns don’t exist, but we can’t passively will our way into a new reality.

To read more, visit sojo.net/enneagram



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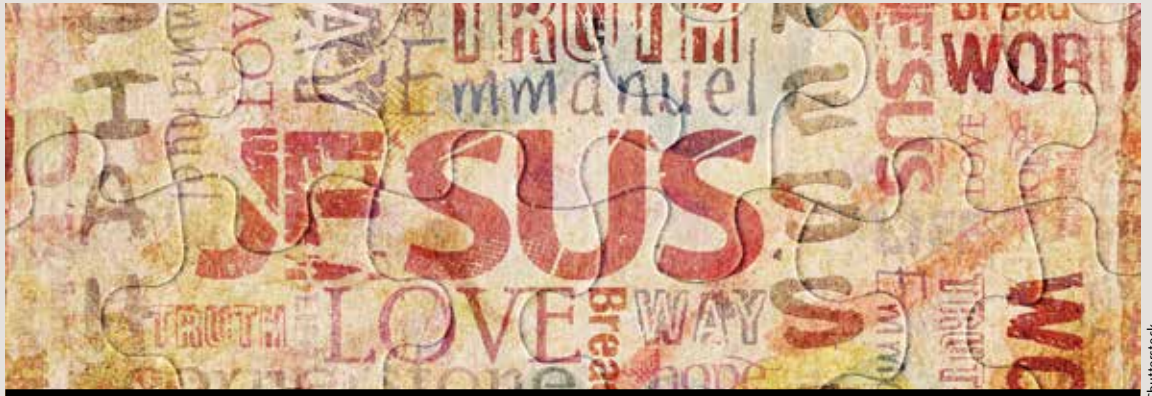


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More than a New Group of Friends

THERE IS THIS unsightly patch of spider veins behind my right knee. It started out years ago after my body had carried to term the weight of three pregnancies and endured the recovery associated with childbirth. A little spider vein turned into a few, which turned into a patch that eventually went from simply visu-

making a new group of friends.

It hasn't been enough to talk about unity without addressing the cost of uniformity. It hasn't been enough to research the most segregated hour of the week and then quote Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The unsightly and painful patch of damaged veins goes much deeper and requires far more than a single injection. The brokenness of the church requires surgery—amputation, transplant, transfusion, or a combination of all of the above. The healing of the church requires a Jesus that is not dressed in Sunday best because there never was such a thing.

I'm not sure I'm ready for that kind of surgery.

The road to this point in time has been painful enough. I've always had an inner critic that was most critical of my own shortcomings but pointedly aware of the failures and missteps of the people and systems around me. Belonging has never come easy. Finding a spiritual home was never easy. Letting go and letting God was simply "never." When you grow up in an immigrant church that "borrows" a "real" church's space, it messes with your sense of faith and belonging, but even in my uneasy relationship with Jesus, evangelicalism, and especially evangelicals, it has been the closest thing

I've experienced to community.

The past few years have been a painfully slow removal of a bandage that was left on too long. It's revealed healing that never happened, a festering of wounds you and I have worked hard to cover up. We're seeing areas that were once healthier now impacted by the spread of implicit bias and unspoken sins. The more you and I unwrap, the more we see how complicated the complicated things actually are.

Honestly, I've never made so many protest signs, marched so many miles, called so many politicians' offices, written so many postcards, worn so many message T-shirts, or prayed so many four-letter words as I have in the past two years. The prayers alone are a canary in the mine considering I have three children on the brink of adulthood.

After social media ranting and raving and real-life protesting, I'm in this place of agonizing pain and yet wondering if a combination of painkillers and caffeine will be enough for now. Anyone else? No? Then you may want to read something else. For those of you who are nodding your heads, let's talk about surgery. ■

Kathy Khang, co-author of More than Serving Tea, is a writer, speaker, and coffee-drinker in the north suburbs of Chicago.



The more we unwrap, the more we see how complicated the complicated things actually are.

ally unappealing into painful and bulging.

I had hoped an injection would take care of both the pain and the patch of blues and greens. However, after closer examination via ultrasound, I learned that a larger vein, which to my untrained eye had nothing to do with that painful patch, was actually the key to treatment. We couldn't start on the surface. We had to dive deeper.

Now there's an analogy.

It hasn't been enough for the church in the United States to talk about racism and sexism. Building relationships across racial divides is good, but it isn't enough. Your new black, white, Asian, Latino, or Native friend doesn't give you a pass. Sure, it's a great photo op or church story, but deep down inside it will take more than everyone



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Rising Up in the Philippines

President Duterte has been called the 'Filipino Trump.' He's worse. But resistance is growing.

by **ERIC STONER**

LAST SUMMER, riding the global wave of anti-establishment right-wing populism that would several months later propel Donald Trump into the White House, Rodrigo Duterte took power in the Philippines. He campaigned on the promise that he would launch a brutal war against drugs, criminality, and corruption—like he did as mayor, when he sanctioned death squads that took more than 1,000 lives—and wasted no time implementing his agenda once elected. At the same time, he has deftly made overtures to the political parties on the Left, which has largely quieted their criticism.

As was the case in the 1980s—during the nonviolent People Power movement that toppled Ferdinand Marcos, the dictator who ruled the Philippines for more than two decades—this has left civil society, students, and faith-based organizations to lead the charge not only for social, economic, and environmental justice, but also against the rapidly growing number of drug-related killings.

At left, protesters of Duterte's extrajudicial killings. Below, young women react upon learning a relative was killed by unidentified men in Manila.



Rouelle/Xinhua/Newscom



Reuters



Students from the University of the Philippines decry extrajudicial killings during a rally in Quezon City, north of Manila.

In January, I traveled to the Philippines to better understand Duterte's rise and to meet with those organizing to stop him. The international news is filled with headlines of the vicious campaign of extrajudicial executions. To explain his commitment to the cause, Duterte has positively compared himself to Adolf Hitler—saying that he would be “happy to slaughter” 3 million drug users—and pledged that the drug war will continue for his entire six-year term. To date, since he took office more than 8,000 people, or on average more than 30 a day, have been killed by police and so-called “vigilantes,” whom critics argue are often connected to state security forces.

As the drug-related killings mounted, a new ecumenical network of people of faith—including clergy from the Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church—and groups such as Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (KADAMAY), the largest alliance of urban-poor organizations in the country, launched Rise Up for Life and for Rights in October.

Rise Up's bold nationwide campaign has several planks. It works to educate the public on human rights—the right to life being the most important—and a more effective and humane way to deal with the very real problem of drugs in the Philippines.

“There is no substitute for social justice,” said Norma Dollaga, a deaconess with the United Methodist Church who works with Rise Up. “If there is social justice and social welfare, there would be less of a chance for the drug trade to prosper.”

Rise Up makes an effort to fill this void where it can, by helping to arrange therapy and medical attention. Rise Up also arranges legal support for those affected by the drug war, which has disproportionately targeted the urban poor, but recognizes it's not enough. “While legal is important, there will be difficulties if we rely on the legal battle alone. There is the legal truth and the actual truth,” Dollaga explained. “Our desire is that the people will get organized and in a loud public voice say that they should stop all killings and end impunity.”

Witness and document

One of the network's most important tasks, however, is simply documenting the deaths to demonstrate the desperate need for due

Aaron Favila/AP

Friends and family members gather around a victim's casket at a church supporting the Rise Up movement.



Eric Stoner process. With the news in January that a South Korean businessman had been kidnapped by police in the Philippines and strangled to death inside the police force's national headquarters, the endemic corruption of the government's drug war is beginning to come to light.

Amnesty International has documented in extensive detail how police plant evidence, falsify reports, and steal from their victims' homes, and how they have established a racket with certain funeral homes, which pay them for each dead body they deliver. Amnesty has also collected statements from both police and vigilantes who testify that they have been paid under the table for each person they kill and given no incentive to make arrests.

Rise Up took me to Bagong Silang, a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Manila, which they have been supporting. The community was reeling over two massacres that had taken the lives of 11 people since Christmas, including three children and a pregnant woman. On the day I visited, they were having the wake and funeral for a 15-year-old and two 16-year-olds who were killed by unknown gunmen on the evening of Dec. 28 as they gathered for a party.

Rise Up is sheltering one other person who was shot twice that night but managed to escape after playing dead until the shooters left.

Friends and classmates who were close to the dead held each other and wept as they marched alongside the hearses, which were carrying the victims playing their favorite music, with signs saying "Stop killing the poor" and "Rehabilitation not liquidation." The church was packed and full of emotion for the funeral, which Rise Up helped arrange. Father Benjamin E. Alforque—a Catholic priest who was a political prisoner under Marcos—denounced the drug war in his homily and called for justice for these children.

The heartrending day ended with another march to a dusty, congested, concrete cemetery to bury the dead, but the work of the growing Rise Up network to end these senseless killings appears to be just beginning.

Protecting the Gains of the Resurrection

Father Benjamin E. Alforque is convener of the church-based Filipino group Rise Up for Life and for Rights. Alforque was interviewed via email in February by Eric Stoner.

Eric Stoner: Was there a tipping point that set Rise Up in motion?

Benjamin Alforque: The tipping point was when the killing of the poor started to include poor farmers and peasants who were leaders of the justice and peace groups and organizations, but who were [falsely] charged with being drug users or pushers.

Are people's opinions of the drug war and extrajudicial killings changing?

Many people thought it was okay to kill drug addicts and pushers. People felt safe that they could leave their homes at night to do their jobs without fear that a drug addict would barge into their huts and small homes, rape women, and kill families just to get money for drugs. They favored

immediate execution because, after all, we have no rehabilitation facilities, the jails and prisons are full, and government has no money to spend for their incarceration and rehabilitation. But now, with the extent of the killing of the poor, many are fearful. They fear that they could be the next victim, because the police have a quota of drug-related deaths, and they could be the next one to fill the quota.

Do you see the Catholic Church taking a more active position? On Feb. 18, the church mobilized some 10,000 people to Walk for Life. Bishops have come into the open, telling the president that death is not the answer to the proliferation of drugs and addiction. This show of force by the Catholic Church against extrajudicial killings related to drugs



[is also against] the move in Congress, with executive approval, to revive the death penalty.

The church could do more. It can open its facilities and resources for the positive care of drug addicts. In its pastoral program, dioceses, parishes, and church-based institutions could strengthen catechetical approaches and family life ministries to address the real social roots of addiction and other related maladies.

But more important, the church should walk with the poor in their struggle for substantial radical social transformation. She must fully give witness to the Vatican II documents, especially becoming more fully the church of the poor through basic ecclesial communities as agents of transformation. She must strengthen her pastoral program with the poor and not make her identity revolve around the sacraments and the liturgy that are emptied of their original social content for liberation-salvation. If the church lives more fully with the poor, then she can protect the poor while at the same time being a target with them. That is her cross and her martyrdom. There also lies her genuine participation in the resurrection of Jesus.

Where do you find hope? In my sermons I say, "You must rise up together and assert and protect the gains of the resurrection of Jesus, the gains that he has in store for all of us who believe in him!"

The mass movement of the poor is where I find hope. They incarnate the passion-death-resurrection of Jesus. They relive the pristine experience of early Christianity in various ways for the event of God's reign. ■

"The church should walk with the poor in their struggle for social transformation."



Catholic sisters call for justice during International Human Rights Day in Manila last December.

Reuters

A familiar playbook

Duterte has received widespread international criticism for his off-the-cuff vulgar and offensive comments, which are often far worse than anything uttered by Trump. During the campaign, in a country where more than 80 percent of the people are Catholic, he called Pope Francis a “son of a whore,” infamously “joked” that he wished he had been the first to rape an Australian missionary who was gang raped and killed, and admitted to having personally shot and killed people himself.

The reasons that many support Duterte mirror those offered by white, rural working-class Americans for why they cast their ballot for Trump. “The vote for Duterte was actually a rejection of elite rule in Manila,” explained Tess Ramiro, the general secretary for Action for Peace and Justice,

see him as one of their own, said Ivan Phell Enrile, the communications officer for Peace for Life, an interfaith network formed to resist the global war on terror and neoliberal economic globalization. “He projected this image that he had no other corporations or big sectors backing him up. He made it appear that he is independent of these traditional politicians in the Philippines.”

Courting the Left

The similarities between Trump and Duterte, however, should not be overstated. While Trump lost the popular vote in November, Duterte won the presidential election by a landslide, and seven months later his popularity has yet to wane. This is no accident. Despite his often incoherent, rambling speeches, in many ways Duterte has proven to be a far savvier political operator than Trump. “He is a great tactician because he is able to manage both the Right and the Left,” Enrile said. In a move that has effectively co-opted what would have likely been an influential part of his opposition, he gave a number of cabinet-level positions—responsible for

agrarian reform, social welfare, and anti-poverty programs—to members of the left-wing National Democratic Front and Communist Party.

Yeb Saño, the former climate diplomat for the Philippines who captured the world’s attention with an impassioned speech and fast after the devastating Typhoon Haiyan struck his country during the 2013 U.N. climate talks in Poland, said that Duterte has also reached across political lines with his appointment of Regina Lopez to head the

Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Lopez shocked mining companies in February when she ordered 23 of the country’s 41 mines permanently closed. “[She] is a friend of ours and she’s been doing well. ... She refuses to issue more environmental clearance certificates to coal-fired power plants. So how can I say anything wrong about that?” conceded Saño, who is now the executive director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

“But on the other hand, your bigger picture view of a people-centered sustainable development does not include inflicting harm on others, especially violating people’s human rights and ignoring the rule of law.”

Contrasting words and deeds

However, Duterte’s ability to forge unlikely political alliances does not mean that he is invulnerable. Supporters will likely begin to question Duterte as the gap grows between his rhetoric and his actions. For instance, he has called himself a socialist and advocate for the poor in an effort to appeal to the Left. “But if you look at his actual policies, he is still very much neoliberal,” Enrile explained. “If you look at his economic development programs, he still talks about private-sector-led development of different social services, privatizing government-owned and -led corporations, and enticing foreign investment, but this time around it’s China or Russia—any country except the United States.”

One issue on which Duterte has clearly followed the neoliberal program is his embrace of what are called free trade “economic zones” in the Philippines, special areas where there are fewer government regulations as well as tax incentives for corporations to set up shop. For example, the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport Authority (APECO) on the east coast of Luzon is one of more than 300 such zones in the country; it’s currently in the crosshairs of an impressive group of young campaigners. They are part of Task Force Anti-APECO, a coalition of organizations and students affiliated with Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB), which means “church in service of the nation.” SLB began as a group of hundreds of nuns,



Duterte has said he would be “happy to slaughter” 3 million drug users.

which played an important role in organizing nonviolence trainings during the People Power movement. “It’s just like saying a vote for Trump is a rejection of the Washington system.”

Despite hailing from a political dynasty himself, Duterte successfully portrayed himself as an outsider and “common man” during the campaign.

“With his manner of speaking, with his populist rhetoric, with the policies that he is advocating,” those who voted for Duterte

Rebecca Lawson of Pilgrims for Peace walks in a cemetery with Father Teodulo Holgado during a funeral for three children who were victims of extrajudicial killings.



priests, and seminarians who deployed to election hotspots to protect the vote during the 1986 People Power movement. Today it is the socio-political arm of the Jesuits in the Philippines.

The campaign against the zone first drew national attention in 2012 when farmers, fisher folk, and Indigenous people whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by APECO marched more than 200 miles from the coastal town of Casiguran to Manila. SLB and the task force played a support role during the action and have since tackled the issue from a number of directions.

They have regularly lobbied government agencies and senators to cut the budget for the zone. With the help of pro bono lawyers, the group also filed a Supreme Court case to repeal the law that authorized APECO, since the people who live in the zone were never consulted by the government, as the law requires. Task Force Anti-APECO has community organizers on the ground in Casiguran as well to work on capacity-building and support the livelihood of locals, who are already losing their land as developers move forward with their projects.

"We are trying to help them articulate

and offer an example of what development they really want," said Bernie Aton, who works on disaster relief with SLB, "so that they can tell the government, 'if you really want to help this community, this is what they want.'"

Mandating peace education

The university system in the Philippines has also been a hotbed of dissent and organizing. In the first mass action since

Duterte assumed the presidency, hundreds of primarily young people across the country came out to protest the burial of Ferdinand Marcos in

the Cemetery of Heroes in November.

Students were primed to take action, in part, because of peace education, which was introduced in the Philippines 30 years ago and has since grown deep roots in the country.

Miriam College, a Catholic school for girls and women in Quezon City that offers pre-elementary to post-graduate programs, has been a pioneer in the field of peace education. As part of a network of schools, it has successfully baked peace education, with a strong focus on advocacy, into the country's education system at every

level—from grade school through college. "Even on the licensure exam for teachers, there are questions on peace education," explained Jasmin Nario-Galace, executive director of the Center for Peace Education at Miriam College and president of Pax Christi-Pilipinas. "In that sense, I think we have succeeded in mainstreaming it, at least for teacher education."

The effort was aided by an executive order signed by then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2006, which peace advocates had lobbied for and helped draft. The order mandates that peace education be included in the curriculum at all public education institutions in the Philippines, as well as be a mandatory part of teacher training.

While mass mobilizations against extrajudicial killings are just beginning, students and teachers took an early lead in making their voices heard on the issue by organizing a range of actions—from letters to the government opposing the killings to spoken word events and candlelight marches and vigils. "While peace education isn't being threatened," Nario-Galace said, "our core values are: the value of life. There is an inconsistency there."

"We believe that people are not beyond redemption," Dollaga said. "We all have the capacity to start life anew. Once they are executed there is no way that they can change. The needs of the people should be provided, and this is part of the redemptive work that can be done for the people. This is the way of compassion. This is the way of mercy. This is the way of love and justice."

In January, after the scandal around the South Korean businessman's death in police custody made headlines, Duterte temporarily suspended the police role in his drug war, indicating that a smaller agency would take the lead, along with the military. In March, he reversed that decision—while also saying that 40 percent of the police force is corrupt. Until these operations stop altogether, the work of People Power-fueled groups will continue to be of utmost importance to the future of the Philippines. ■

Eric Stoner is an editor at Waging Nonviolence and an adjunct professor at Rutgers University.

"We believe that people are not beyond redemption."

Raise Your Hand



If You Live in Subsidized Housing

Our housing policies benefit many homeowners who are least in need of help, while renters are left out in the cold • by NEERAJ MEHTA

I remember the first day of my housing-policy class in graduate school. I was late. I had just left the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority where I was helping a family activate the housing-choice voucher they had recently been granted.

I found a seat near the door in the back of the classroom. After welcoming us, the professor opened with what seemed like a simple request: “Raise your hand if you have ever lived in subsidized housing.” In a class of about 40 students, only three or four hands went up. I kept mine down.

He followed with a second question: “How many of you have lived in a house either you or your parents owned?” I raised my hand—along with a majority of my classmates. “Congratulations,” he responded. “You too have lived in subsidized housing.”

He used the rest of class to describe the two major types of housing assistance offered by the U.S. government.

The first type is public housing and housing-choice vouchers that limit what a household pays for rent to 30 percent of their income. This is what most of us think of when we hear the phrase “subsidized housing.” The Department of Housing and Urban Development runs these programs, which are meant to benefit mainly households that earn 30 percent or less of median income for an area. This might be \$12,750 for a family of four in Mississippi or \$27,600 in California. Congress allots about \$38 billion per year for these programs.

The second form of government-funded financial assistance for housing is the mortgage-interest tax deduction, which allows homeowners who itemize deductions to deduct the interest they pay on their home loans. The deduction can be applied to both primary and second residences, including boats with bathrooms. Most households that benefit from the mortgage-interest tax deduction earn between \$100,000 and \$500,000 a year. This, the largest housing subsidy program in the country, costs the federal government upward of \$100 billion a year.

Learning about these two programs changed my narrative about housing subsidies in the United States.

Race, place, poverty, and privilege

I grew up in a middle-income suburban enclave of St. Paul, Minn. My parents, from India, moved to Minneapolis in the 1960s, rented for a few years in the central city, and soon bought a house in the suburbs. Our neighborhood was mostly single-family houses, a small cluster of apartment buildings and townhomes for rent, and one manufactured-housing park (aka a trailer park). Looking back, I can honestly say that I did not have a single friend whose parents did not own the house they lived in. None of my friends lived in the apartment buildings or the manufactured-housing park. St. Paul was a mostly white community back then, but class lines separated owners from renters.

Halfway through my senior year in college, I moved into the south Minneapolis neighborhood where my parents had first lived when they arrived in Minnesota. The neighborhood was struggling, scarred by years of disinvestment, poverty, and institutional and structural racism. As I built relationships with neighborhood residents, I began to learn about the issues of race, place, and poverty that my suburban privilege made invisible to me.

After college, I worked for a nonprofit



The mortgage-interest tax deduction is the largest housing subsidy program in the country.

affordable-housing developer in Minneapolis, supporting families on their way to economic and family stability. I witnessed the benefits provided by a stable, affordable place to live. Access to healthy, safe, high quality, and financially sustainable housing empowered people to be better parents, students, employees, and neighbors.

Unfortunately, I saw the flip side as well.

The common calculation for housing affordability is that no more than 30 percent of household income should go toward rent. But in most neighborhoods, the number of affordable housing units is a small percentage of the overall housing stock.

A vast majority of low-income households in Minneapolis—and across the country—simply don’t have access to affordable housing subsidized by government programs because there isn’t any available. Instead, families rent units offered via the private market, often paying more (often much more) than 30 percent of their income.

Housing quality at the bottom of the market is often substandard, in part because the business model creates a financial disincentive for landlords to maintain or improve their properties.

A slumlord business model

Leaders of the Minneapolis-based tenant rights organization Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia (United Renters for Justice) have written that the slumlord business model creates huge profits for landlords across the country. “The term ‘slumlord’ is applied to landlords ... who manage their properties with the least possible investment, ignoring problems until infestations become unmanageable and the building falls into disrepair,” the group wrote in a June 2016 blog post. “But the word slumlord means something more than ‘a bad apple in the landlord barrel.’ It is actually a business model, one that is excessively profitable, used across the country, and is widely legal because of a lack of protections for tenants and because existing housing laws are only loosely enforced.”

The rise of the renter population following the housing market crash has allowed landlords to increase rents and push profits higher. Slumlords, according to Inquilinxs Unidxs, rent to vulnerable populations and then foster a culture of fear that allows them to maximize profits by exploiting, abusing, and neglecting their tenants.

In Minneapolis, I knew parents who went to school and took care of their kids while working

multiple jobs to pay for rent, food, and other essentials. As time went on, I began to see that the unstable housing situations of so many of these families were the result of a combination of public, private, and institutional failures, past and present. I knew families who were paying almost everything they earned to avoid eviction from apartments that were not safe, healthy, or secure.

The eviction snowball

As of 2015, more than 20 million renters—more than half of all renters in the U.S.—were “cost burdened,” meaning they spent at least 30 percent of their income on rent, according to a recent survey. That’s an increase from almost 15 million in 2001. While rents have risen 66 percent since 2000, household incomes have only risen 35 percent.

More than 3,000 evictions are filed in Minneapolis each year. As in most other cities, eviction filings cluster in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of poverty, immigrants, and people of color. In north Minneapolis, where I now live, between 45 and 48 percent of renter households have experienced an eviction filing in the past three years.

According to research done in Minneapolis in 2016, an eviction can “lead to long-term instability and barriers to access. Frequently, property owners will screen out potential tenants if they have a prior eviction. An eviction remains on a tenant’s rental record for seven years and can be found in court records indefinitely. Even just a filing can lead to limitations in future access, as this is also part of a standard rental report. This barrier may restrict a renter’s available options to lower-quality or otherwise less-desirable housing.”

Eviction can begin a snowball effect that disrupts a family’s well-being by limiting access to education, employment, and quality housing.

In his Pulitzer-winning book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, sociologist Matthew Desmond describes experiences of renters in Milwaukee that reveal in painful detail what life is like for the urban poor:

- **1 out of 4 poor families** spend more than 70 percent of their income on rent and utilities.
- **3 out of 4 families** who qualify for government housing assistance do not receive it.
- **1 out of 8 families** expect to be evicted soon.

“The persistence and brutality of American poverty can be disheartening, leaving us cynical about solutions,” Desmond writes.



“If you’re spending 80 percent of your income on rent, eviction is much more of an inevitability than an irresponsibility.”

According to Desmond’s research, three out of four people in a typical Milwaukee eviction court are black. Of those, three of four are women. In Milwaukee’s poorest black neighborhoods, one female renter in 17 is evicted through the court system each year, twice as often as men and nine times as often as women from the city’s poorest white areas. Desmond writes, “If incarceration had come to define the lives of men from impoverished black neighborhoods, eviction was shaping the lives of women. Poor black men were locked up. Poor black women were locked out.”

“Eviction is fundamentally changing the face of poverty,” Desmond told The Huffington Post. “One way we can interpret eviction is like, ‘Oh, it’s a result of irresponsibility, it’s bad spending habits.’ But if ... you’re spending 80 percent of your income on rent, eviction is much more of an inevitability than an irresponsibility.”

Desmond makes a strong case for a universal housing-voucher program as an effective intervention to guarantee that no low-income households would pay more than 30 percent of their income for rent. (See our interview with Desmond on page 26.)

The problem is not a lack of resources, but rather a lack of will to target resources so that they benefit low-income people, especially low-income people of color.

Who gets to live here in 2020?

During more than 15 years of living and working in Minneapolis, I have seen the housing market change dramatically—from boom to bust and now to a time of diminishing affordable housing, stagnant wages, and rising real estate values in some historically disinvested communities of color where higher-educated white households are moving in.

The question I have been asking—along with other organizers, advocates, residents, and policymakers—is this: “Who gets to live in Minneapolis in 2020?”

Preventing displacement and promoting equitable community development will require targeted policies and programs explicitly designed to benefit low-wealth communities of color. We will need to use criteria that measure “Who benefits?” and “To what extent?” as we work to allocate resources to the people who are less well off.

Thinking back to my first day in housing-policy class, I see a lot of self-interest tangled up in the ways our government funds housing

subsidies. Let's be honest: Debates about programs and policies meant to benefit low-income households often are about more than just housing; they're also debates about value and "deservedness." To have meaningful, long-term impact, we must combine efforts to advance good policy with efforts to expand the circle of human concern and change the narrative of who is deserving or undeserving of communal support.

Right now, as a country, we have a value gap between homeowners and renters, between whites and people of color, between low-income and upper-income folks. The truth is, we allocate resources to people we value. The more you are valued by society, the more resources you are given.

No matter what we say we believe, white people and wealthier people are valued more than others in America. If you are a middle- or upper-income homeowner, our policies communicate that you deserve support from the government for the cost of housing through the mortgage-interest tax deduction. If you are a low-income renter of color, policies imply that you should work harder and pull yourselves up by your bootstraps and stop asking the government to subsidize your housing costs.

Families living in our cities face many challenges. Race, place, and well-being are highly correlated in America. Cities are experiencing demographic inversion and gentrification pressures as more affluent people choose to live in the center of town. Wages remain stagnant while rents rise. Evictions and forced displacements threaten all too many families. Within this context, we must begin to prioritize and advance policies and practices explicitly to benefit low-income households and families of color.

In her book *Responsibility for Justice*, feminist scholar Iris Marion Young says real progress in addressing racial inequality and poverty depends on acknowledging that life is not fair, background conditions are not equal, and we are not all starting at the same point. We must challenge the myth of meritocracy, which says that anyone who works hard enough can make it in America. And maybe most important, we need to look at the behavior of the "rest of us"—middle class and wealthy—when addressing issues of poverty in the U.S. ■

Neeraj Mehta is director of community programs at the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.



We allocate resources
to people we value.
The more you are
valued by society, the
more resources
you are given.

It Starts With Affordable Housing

Three strategies for revitalizing a neighborhood.

1 Preserve affordable housing as a strong percentage of a neighborhood's housing stock by developing an affordable housing trust fund in your city dedicated to the production and preservation of affordable housing. Institute a "no net loss" policy requiring that all affordable housing units lost through renovation, conversion, or demolition be replaced within the same neighborhood. Establish inclusionary zoning policies requiring that a percentage of units in future market-rate developments be affordable housing units.

2 Prevent involuntary displacement of a neighborhood's lower-income residents by passing a just-cause eviction ordinance that prevents unfair evictions. These ordinances typically spell out "just causes" for eviction and legal rights for tenants who are faced with eviction, including a clear legal process to be followed by landlords.

3 Support community wealth-building strategies that increase residents' economic resources, such as rent control policies that set maximum annual rent increases, worker-owned cooperatives, real estate investment cooperatives, community land trusts that provide perpetually affordable home ownership opportunities, and increases in the minimum wage. —NM



'Imagine It's Your Life'

Evicted author MATTHEW DESMOND talks about the toll that housing instability takes on poor families—and how better-off homeowners are more connected to evicted families than they may think.

It's awkward to become famous for writing about poverty. Just ask Harvard sociologist Matthew Desmond, whose book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction. For his research, Desmond spent more than a year living in trailer parks and inner-city rooming houses to document the housing struggles of eight Milwaukee families—struggles that Desmond could not forget.

"I couldn't help but translate a bottle of wine placed in front of me at a university function or my monthly daycare bill into rent payments or bail money back in Milwaukee," writes Desmond in *Evicted*. "It leaves an impression, this kind of work. Now imagine it's your life."

Desmond used the proceeds from *Evicted* to create two foundations: Just Shelter, which highlights organizations preserving affordable housing, and another to directly assist the families he writes about in the book. But Desmond doesn't want to be lionized; he wants to reframe the conversation about poverty in America.



Harvard Magazine

"When we talk about the poor, it's almost as if we talk about them as isolated from the rest of us, as if their lives aren't connected to ours—but they absolutely are," Desmond told *Sojourners* associate editor Betsy Shirley. As he sees it, that means we all need to consider "how we receive some benefit that others don't—and ask hard questions about the fairness of that."

Sojourners: When someone is evicted, what happens?

Matthew Desmond: Eviction causes loss: Kids lose their schools; families lose their homes, their neighborhood ties, their community ties. Those evicted also lose their things, which are either taken by movers or piled up on the sidewalk. It takes a good amount of money and time to build up a home and an eviction can erase all that.

A lot of our public housing facilities also count evictions as a mark against people's applications, which means we are systematically denying housing help to people who most need it. We have a study that shows eviction can lead to job loss. Then there are health effects, the effect eviction has on your mental health and your spirit. When you add all that up, we have to conclude that eviction isn't just a condition of poverty, but also a cause of it.

You write in *Evicted* that poverty is a relationship. What does that mean? There are two main ways we think about poverty. If we lean right, we tend to attribute poverty to individual choices, like having a kid outside of wedlock or not finishing high school. And if we lean left, we attribute poverty to what sociologists like to call "structure"—big, historical forces like the loss of a factory base or legacies of racial discrimination.

But there's a third way of understanding poverty, and that's the relational way: The rich and the poor are bound together in relationships of mutual dependence and struggle. In relationships of landlords and tenants, more rent means, literally, less money for tenants and more money for landlords.

So if poverty is a relationship, who are the people involved? When it comes to housing, you can focus on landlords and tenants, then expand your vision to think about lending institutions and government regulations

that influence the lack of affordable housing in our cities today.

And you can think about us, people that read *Sojourners* magazine. When we talk about inequality in America, we tend to focus on the top 1 percent, which allows us to locate the problem off in Swiss bank accounts or on yachts somewhere. That absolves us from asking really hard questions about how *our* security and the benefits that we receive contribute directly to America being a rich democracy with the worst poverty.

What kind of benefits are you talking about?

We spend way more money on homeowner tax benefits than we do on direct housing assistance to the needy. We give the most help to people that need it the least when it comes to housing in this country.

How did churches engage with the families that you write about in *Evicted*?

For many of the families I spent time with, the church was really important, especially for Crystal and Lorraine, who were avid churchgoers and rooted their identity deep in their faith. They both received material help from the church now and again, but neither of their churches were equipped to meet their needs in a sustainable fashion. So Lorraine and Crystal got out of their church what Crystal would call “the peace.” They got something spiritual, they got something meaningful, but [not] money to pay the rent. These were not churches from Acts 2; most of our churches aren’t.

In the book, one pastor tells you that it’s the church’s job to take care of the poor and the hungry, not the government. What’s your reaction to that?

I have two reactions. One is that the proof is in the pudding: The church has led on issues of hunger and homelessness, but this is a problem of massive scope, and if we want to hold on to that position, then the church needs to make an investment that’s incredibly serious and will demand sacrifice from its members.

And my second response would be that nothing replaces “the state,” which is just a fancy way of saying “us collectively working together as a nation to make our country better, especially for the least of these.”

What would it take for our nation to ensure everyone has access to affordable housing?



“Real reform would mean those with more on their plate sharing a bit with folks who have a lot less. There’s no other way.”

We could take a program that works pretty darn well—the housing-voucher program—and expand it to everyone below the poverty line. That would make a huge difference. Now, that would cost money; a Bipartisan Policy Center estimate suggested that expanding housing vouchers would cost about \$22.5 billion more every year. That’s not a small figure.

But it’s really important to recognize that we spend more than \$100 billion every year on homeowner tax benefits that go to families with six-figure incomes. There could be modest revisions to the mortgage deduction that could free up a lot of support for housing assistance loans to families that need it the most. But it would mean those who have more on their plate sharing a bit with folks who have a lot less. There’s no other way to real reform.

How could churches provide meaningful ways to help people find and keep affordable housing?

Churches could provide access so that low-income families have more expansive housing searches. If you follow folks looking for housing, they’re often on the bus or on foot, they’re not using the internet. Churches could start a service where they provide families looking for housing with internet help, and folks who have cars could drive them so they can look at housing in areas that are safer and have better schools for their kids.

Churches could also start programs that expand emergency assistance for families facing temporary setbacks. Or take on exploitative lending practices, like payday lending operations.

And there’s the role that churches can play in narrative change: Making a case that the country has a moral obligation to house its people. Whatever we care about—education inequality, health disparities, crime reduction, family stability, neighborhood vitality—the lack of affordable housing is going to be at the root of that issue.

What can people who have experienced eviction teach the church?

I think that they can teach about how much human potential and creativity we squander. There’s this little scene in *Evicted* where Crystal and Vanetta are eating lunch at a McDonald’s and this boy walks in. They’re homeless and they pool their money, buy this boy lunch, and send him on his way. I think those kinds of acts remind us how gracefully and beautifully people refuse to be reduced to their hardships. ■



Just As

I can't fathom trying to do this without my faith." For M Barclay, currently on the path to ordination, faith has never been the problem. For Barclay, the biggest barrier to Christian life hasn't been belief, science, secular culture, or even their own gender identity. The stumbling block, at every point, has been the church.

Like many transgender Christians, Barclay has been told that their gender identity is sinful, that their faith is not valid, and that they should not be called to ministry or involved in Christian life unless they "repent." (Barclay, who does not identify as strictly male or female and uses the pronouns "they" and "them" for self-reference, has intentionally chosen their name, M, for its gender neutrality.)

Whether we know it or not, transgender people are already a part of our church communities. As of 2016, at least 1.4 million adults in the U.S. identify as transgender, and 66 percent of trans people have been a part of a faith community at some point in their life. Unfortunately, 1 in 5 trans people of faith reported leaving their faith community due to rejection.

Still, some trans Christians find the strength to stay.

'I prayed for God to fix me'

Nicole Garcia is one of these persistent people of faith. Growing up, Garcia was a good Catholic boy. As a teen, she went to Mass two or three times a week, and even

sat on the parish council. At the age of 18, she discerned a call to the priesthood, but as the eldest son in a Latino family there were other expectations. So Garcia buried that call to ministry alongside the knowledge that she did not feel like the eldest "son" everyone told her she was.

"I had prayed so hard to God to try to fix me," Garcia said of those early years. "I knew I didn't fit into the roles that I was supposed to fit into." As she got older, she tried to become the picture of manhood—got married, bought a house, went into law enforcement. But instead of finding happiness, Garcia ended up abusing alcohol and having suicidal thoughts. Finally, after a night that nearly ended in her death, Garcia

reached out and got help. She found a therapist and explained her feelings, and how she had been wearing women's clothing and presenting as female in private. The therapist recommended a support group for cross-dressers; there, Garcia heard about a conference put on by the Gender Identity Center of Colorado.

Garcia laughs now, remembering her experience. "I went into this conference feeling alone and I found a couple of hundred people who were just like me. I was amazed. It was incredible." She happened to stumble into a workshop specifically about gender identity and transgender people, and, as she put it, "I heard my story spoken back to me."

"As I'm sitting there in that workshop I finally

transgender – *adj.*
A person whose gender identity does not correspond with the gender assigned at birth.

cross-dresser – *n.*
A person who wears clothing commonly associated with the "opposite" sex.



I Am

Against the odds, transgender Christians persevere.

by **AUSTEN HARTKE**

realized that I was Nicole. I was a woman. It just became crystal clear, and a weight was lifted off my shoulders.”

As it turned out, Garcia not only found herself at the conference—she also met a new friend who was also transgender and also in law enforcement. One day Garcia told her friend that she was considering going back to church.

Garcia wasn’t sure how to find a community that would welcome her faith, her cultural identity, and her experiences as a transgender woman. Her friend from the gender conference suggested an LGBTQ-affirming Lutheran church in downtown Denver.

Cut to the present, and Nicole Garcia is a candidate for ordained ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and has worked for years with the Lutheran LGBTQ advocacy group Reconciling in Christ. She credits the Holy Spirit for all of this and sees her call spoken back to her in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).

Garcia points out that in this story, Philip is sent down a road specifically for the purpose of meeting a person traveling from Jerusalem to Ethiopia—a person who was considered not quite male and not quite female. Eunuchs in biblical times lived as a sort of third gender: They were in-between people, not trusted in Hebrew society and not welcomed in the temple. But Philip is told by an angel to go to the wilderness road and get into the chariot with the eunuch reading scripture. After discussing an important passage from the book of Isaiah, the Ethiopian eunuch asks, “What is to prevent me

from being baptized?” Philip’s only reply is to get into the water of a nearby oasis and bring this outsider—this person whose sex, gender, and racial and ethnic identity all fell out of bounds—into the body of Christ.

Garcia understands and holds this story in her heart and in her body, and that intimate knowledge influences her theology and ministry. Rather than getting caught up in the insider/outsider dynamic that so often hampers churches, Garcia recognizes that “this tremendous gift of grace has been given to all the world, and not to just one people. That’s the key—to recognize that the Word is not just for one type of person.” She has lived life from the perspective of the eunuch—seeking and finding love and acceptance—and now she lives life as one of Jesus’ disciples, telling others the good news and baptizing along wilderness roads.

cisgender – *adj.*
Someone whose
gender identity
matches the gender
assigned at birth.

‘This is who I am’

Barclay grew up in northwestern Florida, in a very conservative culture. Ironically, before coming out as transgender, Barclay was told that they could not become a leader in their evangelical church because of the gender at birth. “I tried to start the ordination process in high school but I was told ‘women can’t be ordained,’” Barclay explained.

Barclay moved away to college and became involved with the United Methodist Church, which holds more inclusive views about the ordination of women. Barclay came out as a lesbian, and although the road got rockier,



“That church
became a safe
haven for me.”

—Taj Smith



a ministry position of some kind still looked possible. The deep introspection that theology requires helped Barclay to understand their own call. Working with other queer people of faith was broadening their horizons. Finally, Barclay couldn't ignore it anymore.

“Once I realized, ‘Oh gosh, this is it. I’m nonbinary. There’s no question—this is who I am,’ I didn’t want to deal with it. It sounded awful. Everywhere I went I would have to teach people about something they think is nonexistent. I hate burdening people, and so

nonbinary – *adj.*
Not identifying
as strictly male
or female.

the idea of asking people to use ‘they/them’ pronouns was just ... yuck. I didn’t want to have to deal with any of it, but I chose to deal with it because I’ve seen and experienced and believe in resurrection—even when people leave your life because they don’t agree with who you are, even when the social stigma feels unbearable, even when my place in the church has been threatened because of my identity. For me, the truth of resurrection is that life is gonna show up, in some way, some form, some fashion, and I trust that. My life has just proven that to be true.”

For Barclay, the liberating power of scripture is found even in verses often used against transgender people—such as “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

“All of Genesis 1 begins with binary language, and when you look at it, it’s kind of obvious that it’s meant to speak to all of creation,” Barclay explained. “It talks about night and day and land and water, but we have dusk and we have marshes. These verses don’t mean ‘there’s only land and water, and there’s nowhere where

these two meet.’ These binaries invite us into thinking about everything between and beyond.”

A new name tag

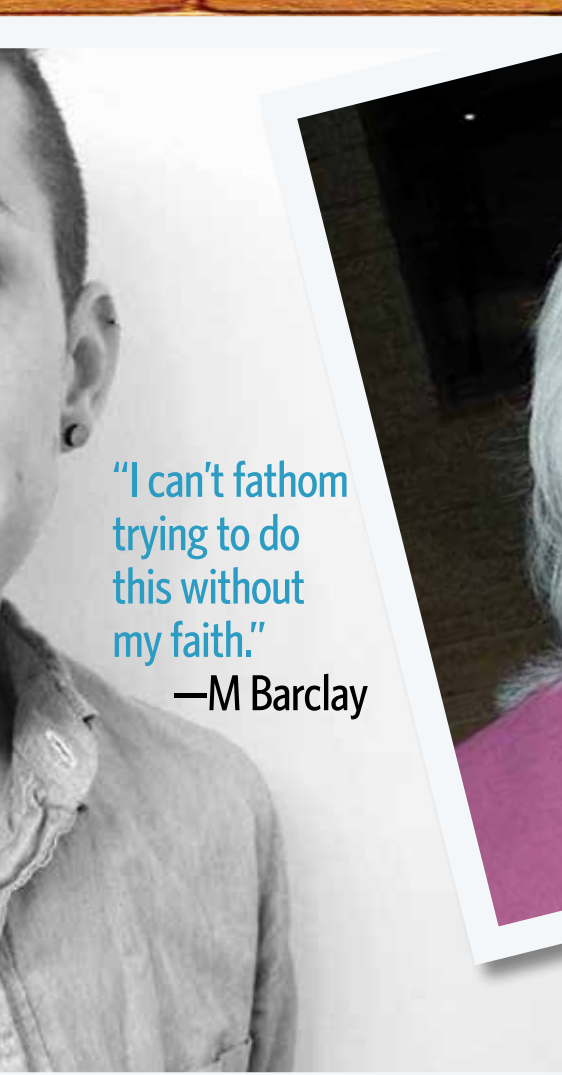
Taj Smith didn’t grow up within the context of a Christian church, but he was incredibly curious about faith. He spent time studying Buddhism and Islam before finally joining a large evangelical church. By high school Smith was a regular at youth group, and he felt at home there—that is, until he came out as queer.

“I stopped going [to church] after a number of folks told me that it wouldn’t work with me being queer, and that I needed to pray harder, and all of those things that people say to queer folks,” Smith laughed. “So I was an atheist for a long time.”

In college Smith found a United Church of Christ community down the road from his campus and decided to give Christianity another shot. But it was around that time that Smith started thinking more deeply about his gender identity. After a period of discernment, Smith realized that he was transgender and decided to come out to his church.

“The first Sunday I went back to my church after I came out as trans, I just remember standing in front of the name tags and staring at mine and thinking, ‘I can’t

queer – *adj. or n.* Formerly a pejorative, queer is often used as an umbrella term for people who identify outside of traditional gender and sexual identities.



"I can't fathom trying to do this without my faith."

—M Barclay



"This tremendous gift of grace is not just for one type of person."

—Nicole Garcia

put that on," Smith explained. The name on the tag no longer reflected who he really was.

"One of the greeters came up to me, and she says, 'You need help finding your name tag?' And she laughed, and I laughed, and I said, 'No, I think I need a new one. I need a new one, like, forever.' And she went, 'Okay!' And she got me a new tag, and she said, 'Why don't you write your name on this one and we'll have a new permanent one for you next week!' And she handed me an order of service and I went inside and thought, 'That was the easiest thing ever!' That church became a safe haven for me."

Now, as Smith looks back on his life, "I say that my transition and my experience of religion in that church are inseparable. My faith and my gender identity are so linked for me that I don't know how to talk about one without talking about the other."

'That's what "abundant life" looks like'

For transgender Christians who have been out for several years, and who have been involved with Christian communities for longer, constantly focusing on biblical clobber passages can be exhausting. Apologetics has its place, but at some point there must be a movement toward a more holistic theology. In that spirit, Smith talked with me about John 10:10 and Jesus' promise of

abundant life for his sheep. Rather than merely protecting his sheep and assuring their survival, Jesus says he comes to assure that his flock thrives. What might it look like to see transgender people thriving in Christian communities?

As a black transgender man, Smith sees abundant life for folks like him in churches where people are valued for their entire being, rather than as part of a diversity quota.

"I find that there are churches I go to where I know people are talking to me because a) I'm a young adult, or b) because I'm black, or c) because I'm part of some other diversity initiative. But when people are just genuinely welcoming, and when people do their best to welcome you and situate you in the community as you are, that's really what abundant life looks like. To have a community to come home to, and to be able to say, 'Yes, I'm a part of that.'"

Being recognized as a child of God, and as part of the body of Christ, is something most Christians take for granted. For transgender folks, this recognition is hard to come by. Yet transgender Christians hold on to belief in a God that makes a way out of no way in a time when Christianity needs it most. Our lives and our experiences speak to God's power at work in the world, and we can't wait to share those stories with you, and to work alongside you in the service of the gospel. ■

Austen Hartke is the creator of the YouTube series Transgender and Christian and an advocate for LGBTQ inclusion in churches. Hartke's book on the theology of transgender Christians is forthcoming from Westminster John Knox Press (2018).

GRIM STATS

- 40 percent of transgender people in the U.S. attempt suicide in their lifetime (nearly nine times the national rate).
- More than half of U.S. transgender people (57 percent) say they feel uncomfortable asking police for help.
- In 2016, the Anti-Violence Project documented 23 homicides of transgender and gender nonconforming people in the U.S., the highest ever recorded by the coalition.

gender identity – *n.* One's personal experience of one's own gender, which may or may not correspond with the gender assigned at birth.

The 'Roadkill' of the Islamophobia Industry

IN HIS BOOK *The Islamophobia Industry*, author Nathan Lean points out that two months *after* the attacks of 9/11, Pew research showed that 59 percent of Americans had a favorable view of Islam. That was a 14-point increase from a similar poll taken in March 2001, several months before the Twin Towers fell. This was likely because U.S. leaders, including President George W. Bush, stated publicly and repeatedly that Islam and Muslims were not to blame for terrorism—terrorists were.

By October 2010, nine years later, only 39 percent of Americans expressed a favorable view of Islam.

What accounted for this dramatic drop? Yes, Muslims committed 11 terrorist attacks on U.S. soil during that period, attacks that tragically took the lives of 33 people, but this hardly seems overwhelming in a nation that experienced 150,000



Reuters

made comments such as “I think Islam hates us” and threatened to enact this worldview into policy.

A week into his presidency, Trump signed the infamous executive order, later blocked in the courts, titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.” Each of the seven nations designated in the document had overwhelmingly Muslim pop-

ulations, prompting critics to refer to the policy as a “Muslim ban.” The Trump

administration claimed that the purpose was to prevent people who might commit murderous violence from entering the United States.

CNN contributor Fareed Zakaria called the policy “truly mysterious” in light of a study by the conservative-leaning Cato Institute that tallied the number of Americans killed on U.S. soil from 1975 to 2015 by citizens of the seven countries in question. That number being zero, Zakaria concluded that the refugees and foreign nationals affected by the policy were simply the “roadkill of Trump’s posturing.”

Among that roadkill was Munther A., an Iraqi who had served as an interpreter for the U.S. government. He and his family had settled into their seats on a flight in Istanbul bound for JFK airport when officials boarded



the plane and removed them.

Additional roadkill included Dr. Amer Al Homssi, who had left his patients in Chicago for a few days to get married in the United Arab Emirates, but was prevented from flying back to the United States because he carried a Syrian passport. When he finally returned, Al Homssi went straight from O’Hare airport to his workplace, the Advocate Christ Medical Center at the University of Illinois College of Medicine. “I’m very anxious to go back to my residency, back to my patients, back to my colleagues,” he told *The New Yorker*. “I’m very delighted to be here to do my work.”

Dr. Al Homssi was far from the only physician whose life and work was disrupted by the travel ban. The Medicus Firm, which recruits physicians for hard-to-fill jobs, reported that across the United States there are more than 15,000 doctors from the seven Muslim-majority countries covered by the original travel ban.

Powerful proof, if there wasn’t already enough, that prejudice not only violates the dignity of particular communities, it erects a barrier to their contribution, thereby weakening the whole. ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American.

“I’m very anxious to get back to my patients.”

murders in the same time span. Lean concludes that the “spasm of Islamophobia that rattled through the American public is the product of a tight-knit and interconnected confederation of right-wing fear merchants ... the Islamophobia industry.”

The controversy the “industry” generated around Cordoba House (the original name for what became known as “the Ground Zero Mosque”) was its first taste of sustained mainstream public influence, but it would not be the last. A few years later, many denizens of this world were either in or orbiting the Trump campaign and later his White House. “Fringe, Sinister View of Islam Now Steers the White House” was how a *New York Times* headline described it.

Trump himself appears to embrace this worldview. During the presidential campaign, he repeatedly

So Out of Words

In a world where too many people
have their fingers on the triggers

of guns aimed directly at black people,
we have borne witness, time

and time again, to executions
filmed on tiny cameras—

which allow us to see too much
which allow us to see not enough.

Judge, jury, executioner—
it's due process in the suburbs

and the city streets, on winding
country roads and highways, sidewalks

in front of the convenience store,
where the streetlights don't shine

in the back corner of a parking lot,
on the playground, behind the fence

in a field near your children's school
on the street in front of your house.

This interminable spectacle
of black death playing on a loop

over and over again until
we become numb to something

that is now a permanent part
of the American memory.

How could these grainy videos
not translate into justice?

I just don't know how to believe
change is possible

when there is so much
evidence to the contrary.

I am so out of words
in the face of such brutality.

Black lives matter, and then
in an instant, they don't.

Marjory Wentworth is the poet laureate of South Carolina. She recently collaborated on We Are Charleston: Tragedy and Triumph at Mother Emanuel with Herb Frazier and Dr. Bernard Powers.



By Danny Duncan Collum

Picked Clean to the **Bone**

How Wall Street raiders helped create small-town despair.

IN THE 2015 speech announcing his candidacy for president, Donald Trump declared, “The American dream is dead.” The people of Lancaster, Ohio, a small town at the edge of Appalachia, heard him loud and clear and later gave him 60 percent of their votes. *Glass House: The 1% Economy and the Shattering of the All-American Town*, by Lancaster native Brian Alexander, shows in fine-grained detail how the American dream of opportunity and fairness died in Lancaster and in similar towns all across the middle of the country.

Lancaster should have been the last place you would look for evidence of American decline. In 1947, a *Forbes* magazine cover story depicted it as “the All-American town.” It had a thriving manufacturing economy, a burgeoning middle-class, and enlightened civic leadership. For reasons of history and geography, Lancaster also had a reputation as “the whitest town in America,” but that didn’t bother *Forbes* too much back then.

The Lancaster of Alexander’s childhood and youth sounds a lot like Bedford Falls in the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*, but as the 20th century wore on, the town turned into Pottersville. When Alexander went back to write this book, he found that the glass factory where his father had worked was demolished. Most people had to drive an hour or more to Columbus for a job, civic life was deteriorating, and opioid addiction was rampant.

The main foundation of Lancaster’s All-American past was Anchor Hocking, a Fortune 500



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Courtney Hall Lee on *Rest in
Power*

forced their way on board the company via massive stock purchases made with borrowed money. Then they used their voting power to make the company more profitable by turning its back on the community, screwing the workers, and selling off the company's most valuable assets.

Perhaps the most "successful" of these grey-suited stick-up men was Stephen Feinberg, then head of Cerberus Capital Management, who ran Anchor Hocking

**Local conservatives
keep insisting that all the
hollow-eyed junkies
on their streets are
"outsiders."**

into bankruptcy. If Feinberg's name sounds familiar, it might be because he's the billionaire buddy Donald Trump wanted to hire to assess the performance of U.S. intelligence agencies. (Carl Icahn, by the way, is Trump's special adviser on regulations.)

Somehow, all these Wall Street pirates managed to load Anchor Hocking to the gills with debt. As Alexander explains it, they transferred the loans they themselves had taken out to buy the company onto the balance sheet of the company itself. By the end of Alexander's story, Anchor Hocking exists mostly to pay interest on the loans that financed its degradation.

Glass House has the style and structure of a grand panoramic novel as Alexander follows a cast of characters located in every strata of Lancaster society. We're in the corporate board room with Sam Solomon, the Monomoy-appointed CEO, who really wanted to "build value" in the company by making quality products and got fired after a year at the top. Alongside him is his corporate counsel, Erika Schoenberger, a minister's daughter who believes that business can be a vehicle to serve the common good.

We also meet longtime union men, such as Dale Lamb, who headed the Anchor Hocking local when Wall Street first came calling, and Chris Nagle, who's still there at the bitter end. Many of the factory workers

Continued on Page 37

glass manufacturer. According to Alexander, the industrialists who built Anchor Hocking in the early 20th century were real George Bailey types. Sure, they wanted to make a buck, but they were suckers for fuzzy-headed notions about the common good that led them to subsidize various public amenities for the town and cooperate with the unions that delivered a family wage to generations of Lancastrians. In those days, we learn, executives and managers might live on the same block with machine operators and share beers at the same local tavern.

The latter-day Potters who brought death to Alexander's hometown were a succession of Wall Street raiders who, over a 30-year period, systematically stripped the town of its sustenance, its sense of community, and its pride. From Carl Icahn's first move on Anchor Hocking in the "greed is good" '80s to its current existence as a trinket on the chain of something called Monomoy Capital Partners, a series of high-finance buccaneers

New & Noteworthy



CHOOSING A DIFFERENT WAY

The documentary film *Disturbing the Peace* describes the path former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters took from armed conflict to nonviolent peace activism, resulting in the creation of Combatants for Peace. A model for overcoming polarization and rejecting violence, in an unlikely place. *disturbingthepeace* film.com

FAITH REMIX

Author Melvin Bray presents a creative, questioning, culturally engaged approach to our sacred stories as a path to a stronger, more just, and loving faith. *Better: Waking Up to Who We Could Be* is a resource for Christians "for whom uncritical certitude is no longer working." Chalice Press

DISPLACED PEOPLE

Global Migration: What's Happening, Why, and a Just Response explains key issues linked to contemporary migration and practical responses, guided by principles of Catholic social teaching. By Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain with input from Catholic Relief Services. Anselm Academic

PROPHETS OF PROFIT

In *Brand® New Theology: The Walmartization of T.D. Jakes and the New Black Church*, Paula L. McGee encourages pastors and scholars to see prosperity churches as a formidable force. She explores such churches' troubling interweaving of commerce and faith and how they disempower their majority-female congregations. Orbis Books

News We Could Lose

IN MY YEARS of writing this column, the politics and culture of U.S. public broadcasting has been a topic in regular rotation. During Democratic administrations, I've tended to bash both the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio for elitism, timidity, and pro-corporate bias.

But during Republican administrations it's always seemed necessary to defend the very existence of a nonprofit, public-interest alternative in the vast, depressing, and sometimes dangerous strip mall that is U.S. commercial media.

These days the timidity of U.S. public broadcasting is still in evidence. For instance, NPR has steadfastly refused to join other prestigious media outlets in calling Donald Trump's patent deliberate falsehoods by the appropriate four-



NPR journalists Michel Martin, Ari Shapiro, Audi Cornish, Scott Simon, and Claudio Sanchez.

to] make our Nation a replica of the old Greek marketplace, where public affairs took place in view of all the citizens."

The last time the country was having this fight over public media funding, my passion came mostly from the fact that our family still had small children, and PBS programming provided some measure of insulation from the wolves of U.S. commerce. Today my kids are in their teens and 20s, and their favorite video outlets are Netflix and YouTube. But I'll never forget what *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* meant to them when they were small. And our neighbor down the road tells us that *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is doing the same for her preschoolers today.

However, in 2017, my main reason for defending public media is more about my adult neighbors out here in rural America, the ones who were tricked into voting for a self-obsessed billionaire who said he would be their voice. The important fact here is that 65 percent of the federal money spent on public broadcasting goes not for program production but simply to keep public TV and radio stations alive in rural areas where the audience is not large and affluent enough to support the station with donations.

Public broadcasting has become a crucial part of the national supply system for real news. In many

cases NPR is the only institution left that brings high quality professional journalism into the homes and vehicles of people who may not have the time or educational background to navigate the wilds of the internet. Without it, they will be left with nothing but the poisoned flow of disinformation that dominates cable TV news. But maybe that's what the new administration wants.

Previous efforts to kill public media have failed because Republican small-government types learned that the constituency for those services is not limited to latte-sipping, Prius-driving, Sufjan Stevens-loving urban sophisticates. Even in this age of fragmented, niche marketing, PBS children's programming has a pretty universal reach. And judging from the listeners I hear on its call-in shows, the NPR audience has broadened considerably in the past decade.

Still, we can't take any chances in the fight to save public media funding. U.S. public broadcasting certainly has its flaws—we'll get back to those later. But its greatest strength is simply that it's ours. Like the airwaves themselves, public media belong to all of us. And that idea alone is worth fighting for. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel White Boy.

Public broadcasting has become a crucial part of the national supply system for real news.

letter Anglo-Saxon word: "Lies." And as for elitism, take *Victoria* ... please!

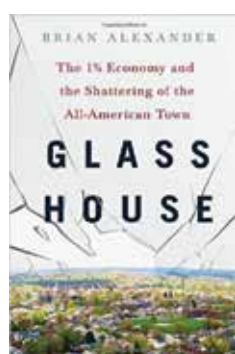
But let's put all that aside for now. The guard has changed again, and a new president has issued a budget blueprint that would eliminate any federal spending to support public broadcasting. So it's time again to restate the obvious reasons why public media matter.

When you get down to it, the essential reasons are still the ones President Johnson cited in 1967 when he signed the bill creating the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This commitment of resources, Johnson said, "announces to the world that our Nation wants more than just material wealth. ... [W]e want most of all to enrich [people's] spirit [and

Continued from Page 35

depicted in *Glass House* followed fathers and uncles into the plant. One of these is Brian Gossett, a young part-time artist who had the misfortune to come along after the bones of Anchor Hocking were pretty thoroughly picked. There he worked in 130-degree temperatures for \$14.55 an hour, for a company with an uncertain future, unaffordable health insurance, and no employer-matched retirement plan. In the end, Gossett takes a pay cut for a more secure job at Drew Shoe, an old manufacturing concern that now makes all its shoes in China but has kept its management and shipping jobs in Lancaster.

Over the course of the book, 26-year-old Gossett emerges as a sort of skate-punk sage. With family roots at least four generations deep in the town, he clearly sees Lancaster's decline but is also



fiercely loyal to it. He despises the owners and managers who let Anchor Hocking fall apart but also admits to taking pride in the work he did there. He's equally scornful of "The System" and

of his own generation's addictions to drugs and smartphones. He despises Facebook and listens to NPR.

But meanwhile, out on the street, many of Gossett's peers are falling into Donald Trump's "American carnage." In *Glass House*, we meet a young woman who injects heroin into her legs while crowing with pride on her Facebook page about seven days without a cigarette. She shares a house with a young man from a longtime Lancaster family who finds in heroin an answer to the "no-future" despair sweeping the town. Another young man, unemployable due to an old felony assault conviction, tries to build a stable family life on his career as a heroin distributor. That works pretty well until he and his girlfriend get busted with five ounces of dope in their car and three children in the back seat.

THE LIVES OF these damaged characters are quantified in the charts and graphs that illustrate economist Nicholas Eberstadt's



SMALL STORIES WITH BIG MEANING

JAPANESE DIRECTOR Hirokazu Koreeda tells delicate, exquisite tales—small stories that invite huge responses. They hold expansive space in which human beings can see what we really are—a little lower than the angels, deciphering what it is to live between the steeple and the gargoyle.

Koreeda's early film *After Life* imagines death being followed by a week of decision during which the deceased are invited to choose the memory they wish to live in forever. It takes place mostly in a nondescript office building, in which ghosts and bureaucrats talk over desks and filing cabinets. But magic is at work. *After Life* is one of the great alchemical films—light and words dance with the viewer's perception, transforming thoughts we thought were ours alone into a recognition of the universal need for love and our aspirations to live better.

Other Koreeda films—such as *Like Father, Like Son*; *Our Little Sister*; and *Still Walking*—are firmly rooted on earth, but the distance between the characters might be cosmic: a family confronting the discovery that their biological son was accidentally switched with another, three siblings meeting their teenage stepsister after their father's death, the survivor of a near-drowning unsure what he owes the family of the boy who saved him.

Koreeda's latest, *After the Storm*, is an exquisite cameo of life. And I do mean life—something more than existence,

something whose beauty depends on simply noticing the gifts of everyday experience. This is a common theme in Koreeda's work—if emblematic masterpiece *After Life* is all about choosing just one moment to take into eternity, *After the Storm* is about how the greatest moments, the most human ones, are often the simplest.

After the Storm locates itself in a suburban housing development and a nearby city, as a man who feels he has failed at life begins to wake up to the invitation to look around. It's one of the quieter films you'll see—limited conversation, gentle silences, minimal music. One of the loveliest elements is that Ryota, the lead character, is a writer who once found acclaim, now working as a private detective. He is trying to establish meaningful relationship with his son and ex-wife and to hear the wisdom in his mother's elderling.

We've seen poetic spirits moonlighting as private detectives in the movies before (most memorably, perhaps, in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*), but Ryota's employment is merely background music to his calling. He wants to reunite his family, but he is becoming aware that getting what you want isn't the same thing as loving others into what they need. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com

book *Men Without Work: America's Invisible Crisis* and his February *Commentary* article "Our Miserable 21st Century." Eberstadt, a fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, has made quite a stir simply by crunching the numbers on unemployment and workforce participation from the past 50 years. He found that the unemployment rate, which counts only out-of-work job-seekers, has become a meaningless statistic. He focuses instead on workforce participation, and there he finds that the combined percentage of the unemployed, the underemployed, and those who are neither working nor looking for work is today at a level equivalent to some years of the Great Depression.

Particularly grim, he finds, are the numbers for men in their prime working years (25 to 54). For every man in that category who is officially unemployed, there are another three who are neither working

A police officer chokes up as he tells Alexander about arresting the drug-addicted children of his high school classmates.

nor actively looking for work. These "non-workers," of course, include the genuinely disabled, the nation's few stay-at-home dads, and perhaps a smattering of grad students or early retirees. But plenty of the nonworking are guys like some of Brian Alexander's Lancastrians who simply grew "sick of scrambling around for minimum wages" and find a life on the jobless margins of society preferable to one slaving at McDonald's or Wendy's.

Of course, women have also been affected by the long-term decline of the U.S. economy. But Eberstadt finds that women without a paid job (and not looking for one) spend significantly more of their time caring for family members or performing other socially useful tasks while men without a paid job and not seeking one are more likely to just hang around staring at a screen. He also cites a 2016 study by economist Alan Krueger that found that "nearly half of all prime working-age male labor-force dropouts— ... roughly 7 million

men—currently take pain medication on a daily basis." These men are less likely than either employed or actively job-seeking men to live in households with children or to participate in any sort of community activities. Denied the disciplines and rewards of productive labor by the United States' wholesale deindustrialization, they seem, like the young junkies of Alexander's Lancaster, to be simply adrift.

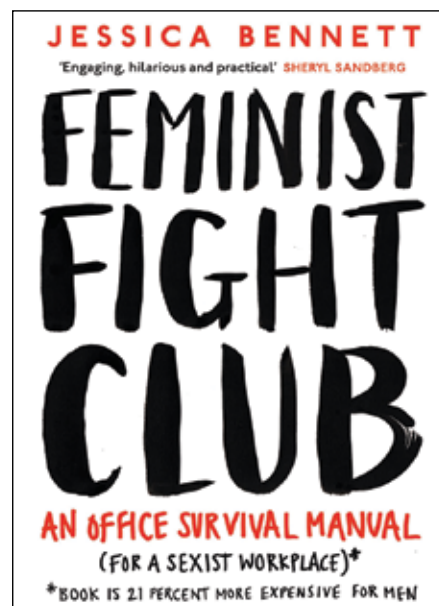
Much about Eberstadt's research is revelatory, and dismaying. However, he also shows the peculiar myopia common to free market conservatives. For instance, he points to the robust rate of wealth creation in the contemporary U.S., but never notes that between 33 and 42 percent of that wealth is held by the top 1 percent of the population. He puts much of the blame for men's withdrawal from the workforce on the availability of government aid, but never notes that wages for most working men have been in decline for almost 45 years.

We hear the voice of free market conservatives in *Glass House*, too. Alexander shows Lancaster's political establishment as brainwashed by Fox News, blinded by pride of place, and incapable of acknowledging what's happening to their town. They keep desperately throwing tax breaks at their Wall Street persecutors. At one point, they cut their public school budget and hand the money to one of Anchor Hocking's absentee owners to head off a wave of layoffs. The company takes the money, and still lays off the workers. These local conservatives keep insisting that all the hollow-eyed junkies on their streets are "outsiders" who, for some inexplicable reason, have picked Lancaster as their haven.

Eric Brown, head of the local police major crimes unit, knows better. He chokes up as he tells Alexander about arresting the drug-addicted children of his high school classmates. Finally, the author asks Brown what happened to so radically change the town they both love.

"Corporate America is what happened," the cop answers glumly. ■

Danny Duncan Collum, a Sojourners columnist, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.



Reviewed by Julianne Gage

TACTICAL TRAINING

Feminist Fight Club: An Office Survival Manual (For a Sexist Workplace), by Jessica Bennett. Harper Wave.

WHEN AWARD-WINNING journalist Jessica Bennett published her saucy *Feminist Fight Club: An Office Survival Manual (For a Sexist Workplace)* in September 2016, it seemed reasonable to suggest "recognizing sexism is harder than it once was."

That was before then-presidential candidate Donald Trump claimed in one debate that his rival Hillary Clinton didn't have the presidential "look" and called her a "nasty woman" in another, and before the leak of a 2005 tape in which Trump boasted of grabbing women's genitals, which he defended as "locker room talk."

But blatant sexism doesn't cancel out the less-obvious forms. Bennett addresses a variety of modern workplace scenarios—from fighting to get a word in edgewise and negotiating equal pay and maternity leave to naming and confronting sexual harassment—with statistical evidence and creative strategies. The latter run from the subtle yet assertive "I have another idea to throw out" in response to male dismissal or interruption to the more overt "Are you her tampon?" when a man asks if a co-worker is on her period.

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EXCERPT

IT'S ALL YOURS

"Let's you and me dance," said the Tempter, alias Old Silky the Liar. "I know a dance called 'King of the Mountain.' Jesus, you assume a kingly pose—dignified, self-confident, in charge, a go-getter, a fixer of the broken world."

"A healer of the wounded earth?"

"That and more, Your Majesty. Here we stand as on a high mountain over the whole wounded earth. All of it under our ... did I say 'our,' I meant your, your command and your guidance. You but give a little nod and wink in my direction, and it's all yours. You only need to acknowledge the 'know-how,' the 'get-up-and-go' I bring the world. Or do you think I'm lying?"

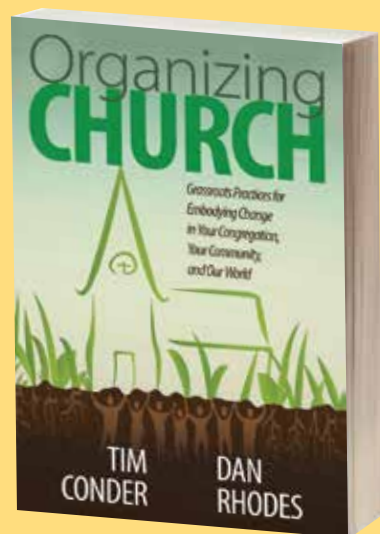
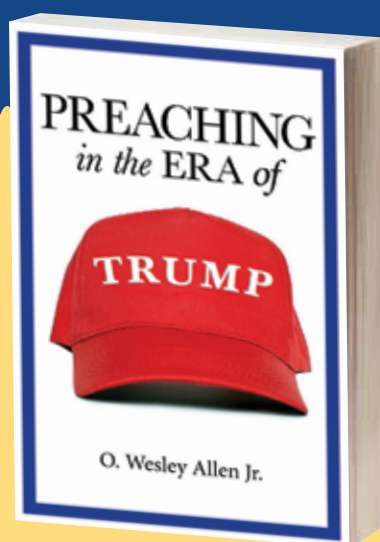
"Only when your lips are moving." ■

Art and text from When God Was Flesh and Wild: Stories in Defense of the Earth, by Bob Haverluck (Liturgical Press). Haverluck uses art, humor, environmental consciousness, and scriptural savvy in retelling four prophetic Bible stories. Printed with permission from Liturgical Press.



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BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

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Like many Gen-Xers who came of age after the feminist revolution, Bennett's awakening was gradual. She started her career as a *Newsweek* reporter in 2005. Until she got there, she knew nothing of the 46 female *Newsweek* employees who, decades earlier, successfully sued over gender discrimination when they found they had been hired as researchers for male reporters on grounds that "women don't write."

In the years and jobs that followed, Bennett and her female colleagues noticed that men not only made more money and rose in the ranks more quickly, they had an easier time creating prestigious job titles, landing comfier desks, and taking credit for ideas—including those of their female peers.

"Like the micro-aggressions that people of color endure daily—racism masked as subtle insults or dismissals—today's sexism is insidious, casual, politically correct, even friendly," she writes.

In 2009 Bennett and a group of female colleagues founded a secret Feminist Fight Club to air grievances and strategize responses. Discussing their salaries empowered them to know how to ask for what they felt they deserved; identifying negative stereotypes of women as bossy, emotional nags who talk too much was a start to thinking about everything from body language to linguistics. This included conundrums such as being criticized for not smiling but not being taken seriously if one smiled too much.

They cut words like "just" and "really" from their vocabulary to sound more assertive and less chatty (although studies show men actually talk more than women in the workplace). They encouraged each other to own compliments by saying "thank you," instead of "it was really no big deal" or "I got really lucky."

She notes that encouraging aware male colleagues to join women in intercepting men who are "maninterrupters" when they interrupt female colleagues not only restores the woman's right to speak, it also builds coworker solidarity between men and women. Plus, the more coworkers join in this struggle, the more aware they'll become of how women of color and members of the LGBT community suffer from even greater levels of workplace discrimination.

Bennett's reframing of the WWJD slogan

is hilariously empowering: Afraid to assert yourself? Worried you're not worthy? Just ask "What Would Josh Do?" says Bennett, "Josh" being the metaphorical mediocre white male employee who never seems to lose sleep over whether he's talented, hard-working, or likeable enough to ask for something.

In addition to lessons learned from her fight club, Bennett draws inspiration from legendary feminists such as civil rights leader and Member of Congress Eleanor Holmes Norton, who led the *Newsweek* lawsuit, as well as from thought leaders such as Sheryl Sandberg, author of the 2013 best-seller *Lean In: Women, Work, and The Will to Lead*, and Rebecca Solnit, author of *Men Explain Things to Me*.

Since reading *Feminist Fight Club*, I have been inspired to join Facebook discussions of female professionals looking to get and give modern advice. Feeling more powerful already! ■

Julienne Gage is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance journalist who consults for mainstream press and international aid organizations.

Reviewed by Courtney Hall Lee

A MURDER AND A MOVEMENT

Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin, by Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin. Spiegel & Grau.

ON A SUMMER night in New York City, my husband and I enjoyed a weekend getaway. We sat atop the High Line, the elevated park along the west side of Manhattan. But our minds were a thousand miles away, in a courthouse in Florida. The George Zimmerman verdict due to come down that night was a dark cloud hanging over our date. We would finally learn if there would be justice for Trayvon. Eventually, we got our answer in the form of an iPhone news alert. George Zimmerman was acquitted.

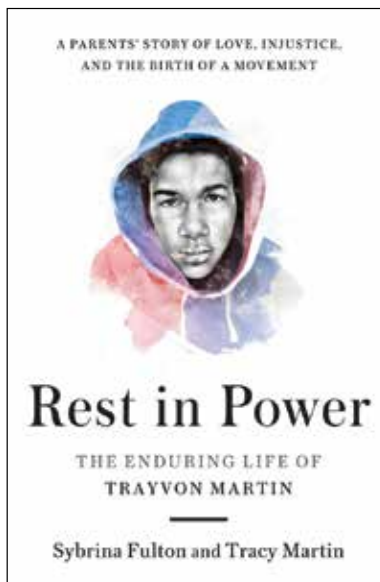
The 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin reminded the nation that a deep racial chasm remains in the landscape of our society. The death of a 17-year-old boy

carrying only Skittles and iced tea was a senseless loss. For black America, it was a sobering reminder that racism and U.S. justice are woven together so tightly that a man could shoot one of our children and be allowed to sleep in his own bed the same night.

Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin is just that, the entire story told by Trayvon's parents Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin. In this raw and earnest memoir, Fulton and Martin allow us to come alongside them as they recall what they experienced in the days and months after their son was killed.

Fulton and Martin, writing in alternating chapters, first share the stories of their lives, from their childhoods to their courtship and marriage. Fulton was raised with a deep faith in God that remained with her throughout the tragedy of losing Trayvon. Martin grew up aware of the challenges of being a black man and supported his sons with attention and love. Though the parents ended their marriage, they remained connected by their children and worked as a team.

The book then looks at life with Trayvon in the time before he was killed. He had normal teenage struggles, but was a good-hearted child who adored his parents and never caused real trouble. When he got suspended at school, his parents decided he should spend the time with Tracy Martin and his girlfriend at her home in a peaceful Sanford, Fla. subdivision. This put him in the sights of George Zimmerman, a coordinator of the gated community's neighborhood watch. Zimmerman followed Trayvon after a 911 operator told him not to. Then he confronted Trayvon



The memoir gives a glimpse into the cadence of everyday life following Trayvon's death.

and eventually killed him with a single gunshot.

That gunshot changed life for Fulton and Martin forever. In shock at Trayvon's sudden death, they also encountered troubling treatment by Florida officials. First, their son's body would not be released or even shown to Martin. Next, it became apparent that the man who shot Trayvon would not be arrested. Sanford police believed Zimmerman acted in self-defense and that Florida's "stand your ground" law applied to the situation. Fulton and Martin were floored, and they began a long and arduous quest for justice.

The memoir gives a glimpse into the cadence of everyday life following Trayvon's death, from the exhausting press appearances their legal team hoped would pressure the police to make an arrest to Fulton's debilitating depression. They recall the first time they heard their son's screams on the 911 tapes and their refusal to attend the reading of the Zimmerman verdict based on their fear of what came true, that their son's killer would go free.

Rest in Power is a poignant and painful story that still manages to provide some hope in the form of the countless supporters who were moved to start a movement in Trayvon's honor that endures under the banner Black Lives Matter. Trayvon's legacy is kept alive through the rallying cry, "I am Trayvon." ■

Courtney Hall Lee (@courtrhapsod) is a freelance writer and co-host of the Dovetail podcast, a show about the intersections of faith, culture, and social justice. Her book *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth* is forthcoming.



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A collection of metal shackles and a chain shadow. Several metal shackles are scattered across the upper half of the image. A long, dark shadow of a chain extends from the left side across the middle of the image.

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The Beatitudes and Executive Order 13767

OUTSIDE, A HELICOPTER circles this D.C. neighborhood, a dog barks anxiously in the alley. Inside, a woman sits in a straight-backed chair reading the Beatitudes. She adjusts her glasses. *“Bienaventurados los que lloran, porque ellos recibirán consolación.”* Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. “It’s a beautiful prayer,” she says.

My neighbor Lola cleans office buildings during the week, takes English classes on Saturdays, goes to Mass on Sundays. Her husband operates a jackhammer for a construction crew. On the “Day Without Immigrants,” Lola’s boss said because it wasn’t organized by the union, workers should not stay home. So she went to work. Her husband stayed home. “We have to stand together,” he said.

Lola and her husband sometimes share their one-bedroom apartment with a man who was



A deportee is transferred to a plane bound for Guatemala.

Reuters

church members have been unable to get any information about them from ICE officials.

A few of Lola’s neighbors have attended meetings to learn what to do when ICE agents come to one’s home or work. They learn the differences between ICE paperwork that does not allow entry into a home and an official warrant signed by a judge that does. They learn how to sign over power of attorney to someone for the care of their children, should the parents be suddenly apprehended.

One of Lola’s neighbors believes ICE only patrols certain “federal” highways and has an elaborate route mapped out for getting to and from work. This is dangerously untrue—but in a slow-motion crisis, rumors fly and false hope is found in a thousand Facebook posts.

Five days after his inauguration, Mr. Trump announced that it would be his policy going forward to “secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall” and “detain individuals apprehended on suspicion of violating Federal or State law” (executive order 13767). While the first is primarily political theater and another reallocation of taxpayer funds to private industry, the second is tearing apart families and neighborhoods. And churches are defending their mixed-immigration-status

communities by reasserting their ancient, biblical “right of sanctuary”—that a consecrated place may offer protection to those fleeing injustice or persecution. In the 1980s, U.S. churches offered safe, but illegal, passage to people fleeing death squads in El Salvador. Today, churches are shielding from deportation those already in the United States.

In March, 20 blocks from Lola’s apartment, 17 religious traditions launched the District, Maryland, and Virginia Sanctuary Congregation Network. Metropolitan AME’s pastor Rev. William H. Lamar IV spoke at the press conference. People ask why we stand with immigrants, he said. “Because black bodies have been assaulted since we first came to the States,” he replied. “What we know is that if we are silent when brown bodies are assaulted, when gay bodies are assaulted, when trans bodies are assaulted, when female bodies are assaulted, then all of us remain imprisoned and in bondage.”

“Bienaventurados los que tienen hambre y sed de justicia,” reads Lola, *“porque ellos serán saciados.”* Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. It is a beautiful prayer. ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



False hope is found in a thousand Facebook posts.

their neighbor in El Salvador. He works days, nights, weekends. He sleeps on a mattress in their main room for a few hours in the afternoon. Lola leaves pupusas for him, wrapped and warm. Sometimes he drinks too much, turns up the radio, dances. They quiet him so he doesn’t disturb the neighbors. He feels safe there.

A few miles from Lola’s apartment, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided Rising Hope United Methodist Church in northern Virginia (under President Obama, such “sensitive locations” were considered off limits except in extreme cases). Men were rounded up as they left the church’s hypothermia shelter. They were detained and effectively “disappeared,” since

An Avalanche of Fire

SUMMER IS ALMOST HERE, and churches ... slow ... down. Folks are planning for vacation. Staff are away. Pastors are away. It's as if we take our status as middle-class bourgeoisie more seriously than our baptismal vows.

By contrast, in the summer the biblical texts pick up—in intensity, directness, drive. Pentecost falls on us like an avalanche of fire, teaching us languages we don't know, names, places, people. The old joke is that war is God's way of teaching geography to Americans. No, in the church, that would be Pentecost. The descent of the Holy Spirit empowers people to preach who most say shouldn't (in our texts that includes Arabic-speakers, women, unnamed prophets), and confounds those of us who think we "should." Then Trinity Sunday, and all three persons of the triune Godhead are on the stage. We now know God as fully as God can be known by mere creatures. What we can't know is not because God is tragically removed or far away. No—it's precisely because God has come so unbearably close and is so unimaginably beautiful. That's why we can't take all of God in. So we praise instead of merely examine. And then Jesus sends out the disciples in mission to do what he does, or even greater things.



Teach. Heal. Exorcise. Baptize. This doesn't sound like a summer vacation or even a mission trip. It sounds like a new way of being in community for others.

That's what the church is, in summer or anytime.

Jason Byassee holds the Butler chair in homiletics and biblical hermeneutics at Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia.

[JUNE 4]

Open the Gates

Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:24-35b; Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39

PENTECOST IS NOT, safe to say, the most beloved of Christian feasts. Marketers haven't yet figured out how to monetize it. It has no cute baby in the manger; no empty tomb and bunny, no secular holiday nearby to get away for a long weekend. Furthermore, it's weird. Tongues of flame on everybody's heads. People speaking in languages they don't know. To quote the immortal Bill Murray in *Ghostbusters*, "Dogs and cats, living together! Mass hysteria!"

The 20th century may be remembered in history as the time when God reminded us that God is triune. The Holy Spirit is a person of the Trinity not less than the Father and the Son. Upward of 669 million Pentecostals worldwide now show us this. Before 1906 at Azusa Street church in California, there weren't really any Pentecostals. After several weeks of revival across race and class lines, it seemed as though the Holy Spirit had fallen again, and she hasn't quit falling on us.

While on the church calendar Pentecost is massively important, lay people may need

some help imagining it. So have them speak in tongues: Have folks stand and read the scripture in languages as various as those at the first Pentecost (Acts 2:8-11—extra credit for Arabic!). Plan it, that is, if you don't trust God to turn up miraculously and have people preach in languages they don't already know. That first Pentecost was bizarre enough that folks accused the disciples of being drunk. Peter's answer is not convincing (verse 15 implies we'll *all* be drunk later!). No, these are drunk with the Holy Spirit, not wine. It's the best sort of intoxication there is. It throws open the gates to foreigners from all nations. Folks with names as weird as Medad and Eldad will prophesy (Numbers 11:26). Moses wishes all God's people would have the Spirit and speak in tongues (11:29).

You have to watch that Spirit. When she gets loose borders open, foreigners preach, "strange" nations are dignified with the Holy Spirit, everybody seems drunk, and people convert by the thousands.

And no baby or bunny is needed.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

[JUNE 11]

We Still Doubt

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8;
2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

HAVE YOU NOTICED that preachers tend to abdicate on Trinity Sunday? A teacher of mine used to say preachers start that day by apologizing for their lack of knowledge on the subject before spending what time is left demonstrating that very lack.

The most important thing about God, first and last, is that we can't understand God. Who could? Only God can understand. Staggeringly, God has shared some of that self-understanding with us through Mary's womb and Pentecost's fire.

Sarah Coakley might be our most important Trinitarian theologian just now. She suggests we start not with doctrine, but through prayer. The more you pray, the more you notice a conversation *already in progress*. That's God talking to God—the Spirit's love-language to God coursing through you, making you and all creation holy. You don't imagine this teaching by thinking hard. You open yourself up to it by praying hard.

These texts point the way. Genesis 1 has all the elements—wind, a voice, and God whimsically saying "why not?" and making a world. Paul's letter to the Hebrews interprets Psalm 8 as a description of Christ's incarnation, becoming "a little lower than the angels." Paul gives the Corinthians a full-blown Trinitarian doxology. But the jewel in this crown is Jesus' post-resurrection charge to go and tell. Every missionary on the planet has memorized this verse and taken it to heart. But just before it is this absolute pearl: "but some doubted" (Matthew 28:17).

What?! What more does God have to do? Scramble out of the grave with thunder and lightning and an angel and ... we still doubt. That's humanity before God. Not just because we're fickle and weak. But because God is so unutterably amazing.

This can't be said often enough: Had we seen the Red Sea part, had we witnessed the resurrection with our own eyes, we would be no more faithful than they. And yet the Spirit would still rumble prayers from right underneath our ribs, transfiguring us and all creation into the body of Christ.

[JUNE 18]

Love of Strangers?

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35 - 10:8-23

YOU MAY HAVE heard some consternation over refugees and immigrants in the United States. Does the Bible have anything to say to us about this?

Abraham receives three mysterious visitors in the heat of the day (Genesis 18). These three (verse 2) are also one “Lord” (verse 1), leading Christians to see here a glimpse of the Holy Trinity. And Abraham roars into action. He *runs* (in the desert), prepares the fatted calf, makes a feast fit for kings. He doesn’t know these three. They are strangers. But because he treats them like divine visitors, they are. Abraham is remembered in Judaism as being consumed with *philoxenia*, the “love of strangers.” He is showing us all how to treat everyone we meet.

But did he check their immigration status first? Their country of origin?

Our age worries about security, for understandable reasons. Does the Bible say anything about this?

Psalm 116 has often been used to commemorate martyrs in Israel and in the church: “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his holy ones” (116:15). Christians’ response to danger is not arming ourselves and kicking out strangers—it is to name the risks, and the rewards, that come from living a courageous life. Paul warns the Romans that they will suffer. They, we, do this because God dies not for good people, but for murderers (Romans 5:8). My wife, Jaylynn, preached this text the Sunday after 9/11, and I still tear up thinking of her bravery. Jesus sends the 12 out with no money, no provisions, nothing other than one another and a burning desire to heal, preach the gospel, and inch the kingdom closer. It won’t be easy—there will be conflict, don’t doubt it for a second (10:21). But those who endure “to the end will be saved” (10:22).

But never mind any of that. In fact, never say anything that matters. Jesus has no opinion on “politics.” Just help coach souls on going to heaven. And ignore these words of welcome to strangers even amid danger. I’m sure God doesn’t mean it.

[JUNE 25]

Blessing Our Enemies

Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

PREACHERS TEND TO avoid morally troubling texts in the Bible. But our hearers know those texts are there. Our avoidance means that when they stumble across them they have no resources with which to read them.

One morally troubling issue in scripture is how Christians relate to the sons and daughters of Ishmael (Genesis 21). I learned this from hearing Debbie Blue preach in Vancouver, British Columbia, recently. Israel tells Ishmael’s story as one of sibling rivalry. Hagar and her child are cast out into the wilderness to die. But like the Israelites’ cries from Egypt centuries later, God hears Ishmael’s cry (Genesis 21:17). God speaks comforting words to Hagar, and promises her (this is staggering) “a great nation” (21:18).

Who tells origin stories of their *enemies* like this? That God reverses our desire to get rid of them? God hears *their* cry? God promises to make something unimaginably good from and for them and others? And what Christians are aware of the stories of blessing we have for the children of Hagar, the matriarch of the prophet Muhammed, *in our own Bibles!* Genesis shows that God already answers Hagar’s cry before she makes it.

If you preach this, you’ll get in trouble. That should be no surprise. Jesus *promises* trouble (Matthew 10:34-36). If there’s no trouble, then we’re doing it wrong. Everywhere Jesus went, healing and teaching and blessing and creation-restoring broke out. So too did swords, quarrels, hatred, persecution. And Jesus somehow makes it all sound like such a good time.

So I suggest we preach stories about difference, about conflict, about God’s blessing of those we’d rather curse. Folks will lash out at us. We don’t have to lash back. The Romans ask Paul, if grace is so great, why not keep sinning, to get more of it? (This is the sort of question that shows we’re preaching grace with sufficient extravagance.) Simple, Paul says. You’re baptized (6:3). Drowned. Dead people can’t sin. They also can’t lash back.

They can, apparently, preach. So let’s get busy. ■

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Space, the Final Mission Field

News item: Astronomers have discovered a solar system 40 light-years away with seven Earth-size planets revolving around a small star. At least three of these planets have ecosystems conducive to life.

God: Did you hear about those planets just discovered, my son?

Jesus: Yeah, I saw it on The Huffington Post. By the way, it's gotten so stridently partisan that I call it The Huff-and-Puffington Post. Hah hah. Get it?

God: Very clever, my son, in whom I am well pleased.

Jesus: But how could these planets be new to you; you know everything, and you made everything, right?

God: Of course. Starting with the Big Bang when ...

Jesus: I KNEW that was you!

God: Regardless, it is time for us to consider sharing the gospel of peace



that I am their God and have created them, and love them enough to ...

Jesus: Let me stop you right there. I know where this is heading. Four words: Been there, done that.

God: But what better way to reveal myself than to send my only begotten son?

Jesus: How about leaflets? Have you thought about leaflets? Disciples could stuff them in people's mailboxes, or we could drop them from the sky. Leaflets from heaven, like manna, only less sticky and with fewer flies afterward.

God: A living witness is what is required, to truly express my divine love.

Jesus: But they didn't exactly roll out the red carpet last time. And it didn't end well, remember?

God: But I want them to know that I forgive them their sins, and for their atonement my son will pay the ultimate price.

Jesus: Would you take a check instead? Or I could put it on a credit card. With all due respect, I don't want to have to put up with the same old abuse again. At least wait until their societies have matured, and their technology has evolved. Then maybe we could use Facebook to share the Good News. And John 3:16 is short enough to tweet.

And then maybe I could triumphantly *drive* into town on Palm Sunday, instead of taking the slow ride. On humid days, I *swear* I can still smell donkey on me.

God: So *that's* where that odor is coming from. I thought it was me.

Jesus: Why not send the Holy Spirit instead, and have her stay longer this time? She's not doing anything right now except answering prayers—like that's hard.

God: But no pain, no reign, my son. Plus, it would twice fulfill the promise of redemption, the one foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament.

Jesus: Actually, I'm more of a New Testament guy. But if I agree to it, can we do the whole shock-and-awe thing this time? You know, take it to them where they live with righteous wrath and fury and really put the fear of You into them. Now *that's* retail.

God: No, my son. The suffering servant model is what we want to convey. To forgive, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to ...

Jesus: No offense, but that's not working out so well on Earth. Lots of Christians use my name, but their actions don't match up. And one of the worst is ...

God: Don't say Mike Pence.

Jesus: ... Mike Pence.

God: So, we'll try again on another planet.

Jesus: But let's not give up on Earth just yet. I've got too much equity in it. Most of it will soon be under water anyway, so maybe a second great flood will open their eyes.

God: Actually, it will be the first. The last one covered just a couple counties. They only *thought* it was bigger. But reaching out to new planets is big, my son. The vastness of space is the final frontier. For us to boldly go where ...

Jesus: (I wish we'd never gotten cable up here.) ■

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New planets mean new opportunities for the divine business model.

and love to the people of these new worlds, all created in the image of me.

Jesus: By the way, those people on Earth you created in your own image, have you looked at them lately? They look more like the image of a large bag of cookies.

God: Yes. I never should have created sugar cane, although I'm still proud of the lime, a hint of which is used in some delicious tortilla chips. You just can't say no to them.

Jesus: I figured you'd regret creating tobacco more than sugar, but whatever.

God: The tobacco plant has a lovely leaf, but they weren't supposed to smoke it, for My sakes! Regardless, I think it is time we reach out to the people of these planets and reveal

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